SCIENCE STORIES

FEBRUARY, 1954
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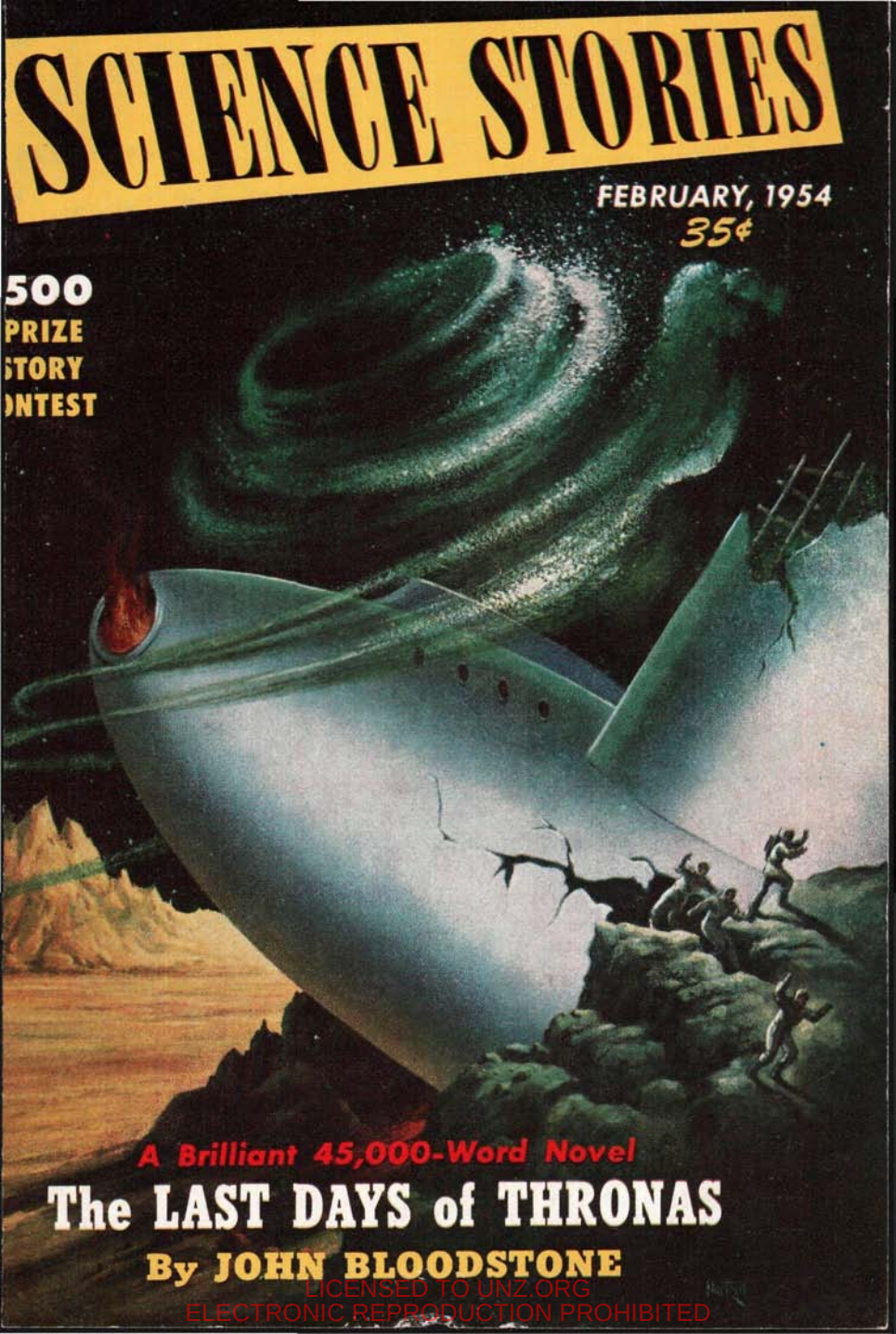

A Brilliant 45,000-Word Novel

The LAST DAYS of THRONAS

By JOHN BLOODSTONE

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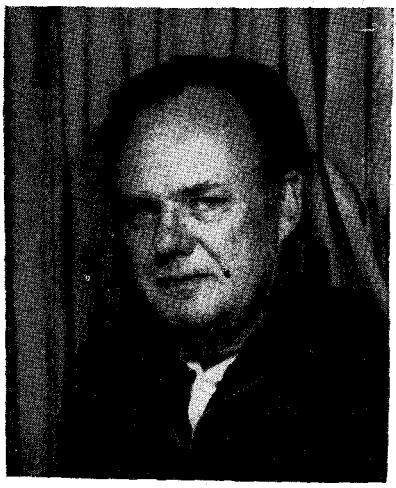
The People Who Write SCIENCE STORIES



ALBERT A. NUETZELL

SOME people don't realize what it's like living with a science fiction fan in your house. Whether you like it or not, you quickly get educated to what *bems* are, or what *stf* means.

But above all, you can't help getting a little interested in this growing field of imaginative fiction. If you are an artist, as I am, you find hundreds of wonderful pictures coming to mind.

Of course it wasn't my idea alone to do cover work; the fact that my son decided to have some original cover illustrations — without paying the price required to purchase them at stf conventions — had something to do with my first trying a hand at cover work. His continued prodding galvanized my already interested brain into action. Before long he was sending in sketches to the editors of this magazine.

As a result of it all, I've now been asked to do an autobiography to be featured with a photograph, in this issue, so I might as well get with it.

I was born in New Albany, Indiana. As a young boy I played in the Louisville Orchestra, but it was in High School that I first got my taste for artwork, when working on the school annual, as art editor. I then went through the first stages

(Continued on page 128)

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SCIENCE STORIES

Issue No. 3

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Editorial

THIS month SCIENCE STORIES is conducting a "talent search." You may be the one to be "discovered" by us, and at the same time, you may find yourself with a check for $500.00 in hand. Stranger things have happened!

Ever since your editor himself entered a "prize contest" conducted long ago by Hugo Gernsback in the old *Amazing Stories*, for a story written around an intriguing Paul cover that showed an ocean liner being lifted by a great metal sphere on magnetic grapples, while a group of nude red-skinned women with strange fleshy capes attached to their heads and shoulders sat on a cliffside and watched, he's had a soft spot in his heart for such "stunts." For out of that one came some mighty fine stories, and some mighty fine writers. We remember Clare Winger Harris was one of them. . . .

Now, once more, we're running a cover and asking our would-be-author readers to try their hand at writing a story in which the scene occurs, and is also a vital part of the plot. And because this is a talent search, we want the selected story to be by a writer who has never before sold a story. We want to find new blood for science fiction.

This doesn't mean that we haven't enough talent right now to give us the finest science fiction contents pages in the field (we think this issue of SCIENCE STORIES is particularly fine — and our sister magazine, UNIVERSE, has a line-up for December that would make any science fiction editor green with envy), but sometimes new minds think in different patterns and something unexpected comes of it. If we want more of the same we can get it. But we also want something new. Maybe this will bring it. . . .

How do you know you can't write something that will make us exclaim: "That is it!" How do you know that the "unorthodox ideas" you have concerning what you would do if you were the writer aren't just what we are looking for? Besides, we haven't the slightest idea what we *are* looking for. Here's a chance for some real originality to develop.

Take a look at the cover. A space ship, obviously damaged, some men, its crew, outside it. And hovering over it a "something," a shadow, a shapeless shape, clutching, menacing. . . .

Well, if you write *that* story, you undoubtedly won't sell it. But

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sometimes things aren't all they seem to be. Maybe you can see something here that isn't the obvious. Maybe you can write a story which seems to lead to the obvious, then slaps you right in the face with originality. If you can, you're going to command our attention.

How much? We said $500.00. And therein lies our only real specification — the story must be 10,000 words or over. If you are conservative with words, and write 10,000, you'd be paid 5c a word. If you were wordy, or your idea was so tremendous it carried you to say 20,000, you'd make only 2½c a word.

There is only one more specification—and that is the editors reserve the right to change an itty-bitty comma if they so choose, after they buy the story; or change any other thing, including the title. Even the experts aren't immune from the blue-pencil! Besides, if you think the story is that good, it most certainly isn't.

This magazine goes on sale December 2. It isn't easy to write a 10,000-word plus story, especially if you've never done it before, or if you have, have never sold your efforts. So, we'll give you plenty of time. Let's say that you should have your story on this editor's desk on or before April 1, 1954. Then we will publish one of the stories we receive and pay for it on June 1, 1954, in the August issue of SCIENCE STORIES. The others we reserve the right to buy at our regular rates, or to return to the writer.

Who knows, you may be the next "Mr. Science Fiction!"

In our December issue you read John Bloodstone's novelet, "Potential Zero." No doubt you were impressed. Now we want you to read the new novel, "The Last Days of Thronas," by the man we think is the logical successor to the great Edgar Rice Burroughs. And did you know, some of your favorite writers appear in our new MYSTIC magazine? Rog Phillips, Chester L. Geier, Randall Garrett, and so on? Why not pick up a copy and see what your favorites can do when they turn their hand to stories of the occult. Maybe you'd be more than pleasantly surprised.

— *Rap.*

REMEMBER — In order to compete for our contest prize of

$500.00

your manuscript must be in our office by April 1, 1954. Read the editorial for details of the contest, then get at your typewriter and start your story.

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By John Bloodstone

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Last Days of Thronas

After five years of slavery Garthanas, the Hamarian Sword, returned to find that he had been deserted by his sweetheart and betrayed by his best friend. He lived for revenge only, and to that end he dared to cross the star-sea in the mysterious god-ship, relic of the forgotten past, and protector of the tyrant Thamas I, ruler of Thronas and oppressor of Hamar.

Illustrated by J. Allen St. John

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The golden years are dead and cold
And gone are the Hamar Kings of old,
When Thronas was their own.
Who hears the magic song of Uld,
Whoever shall great Thar behold? —
Who held loved Cernath's bridge, alone . . .

THEY were singing it now, just as he had heard it sung along the great canals—not openly so that they could be identified—but in isolated groups lost from view among the smouldering rubble of the shattered town. The Thronasian guards stalked through the ruins searching for slaves to take back with them, and they pretended not to hear the ghostly murmur of it rising over the land like the voice of a murdered race sounding hollowly out of its tomb.

It was a forbidden song, but it could never be stopped. And they feared it. In other days he might have laughed at those imperial egotists clanking pompously about in their battle harness and trying not to appear impressed by the distant warning of the defeated Hamarians. But now he clenched his big fists and was pleasantly aware of corded muscles rippling along his heavy forearms. He hated. But it was more than the mere troops of Emperor Thamas I that he hated. Especially today.

The Empire and the ramparts fell
Where Muthark's ancient temples knell
The death-song of old glory,
Where nevermore the golden swell
Of temple voices will retell
Great Melthas' ancient story . . .

Humming it rather dispiritedly to himself—it was more to steady his taut nerves than anything else—he walked onward, trying to be unobtrusive, which was difficult in view of his apparent size and strength and the convict's slave brand on his forehead, cancelled though it was by the neat little cross that told he had served his time and was free.

Free? For what? Vengeance? Who could inflict vengeance upon the gods? Or was that the only thing left to sustain him? He had heard much to disturb him, and now he was coming home to find out if the worst of it were true. Derkalas, his old friend and battle companion, co-leader of the revolutionaries, could never have done to him what they told him he had done. He had to find out. Here was the home of Derkalas. It might be in ruins, but Derkalas might be alive, or his wife and children.

Grimly, he stalked through the rubbled streets and tried not to be recognized by the fleeing survivors as they passed him. Yet he heard his name mentioned behind his back.

"Garthanas!"

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It was always the same. Men, women and children would hurry through the narrow streets toward him and avert their eyes. Once they had passed, the little explosion of whispered comment would start. But when he would glance back at them they would turn their heads away and hurry onward.

He suppressed an inclination to grin about it. They were following the pattern of the old days, still trying to conceal his identity from the authorities, yet taking courage by his presence. Well, it was no longer necessary to conceal him. The authorities knew all about him and he had served his time, although he might have escaped and let Derkalas serve. Instead, he had covered him and taken the rap, himself, because Derkalas was married and had two children.

"Garthanas!"

The fair-haired and fair-complexioned Hamarians, the exiled race, were still saying his name. His was a darker skin than theirs. He was a mixture, but they hailed him as their chief, their only symbol of hope and pride under the shadow of mighty Thronas.

However, the greatest shadow of all was that which had given the Muthark Dynasty its power to conquer the House of Hamar. It was that dreaded and hated thing which hovered even now in the sky, looking back on its cruel work of destruction. His eyes narrowed as he looked up at it, and again his fists clenched.

There it was like a yellow egg in the sky, waiting for its cargo of warriors and slaves. The Golden Ship! The only link between this little world of Hamardeen and great, broad Thronas, thrice its size. The Golden Ship from nowhere that was the home of a metal god who answered only Thamas, the Emperor.

How fight a thing like that!

"Garthanas is back! Back from the canals! He walks free in the land again!"

He walked onward, quickening his pace, angered at fate. If only the gods might give him the confidence that his appearance gave to his chosen people! But the wellspring of faith and belief in the promise of life was a pool of dust. Hamar reduced to an exiled colony. His best friend, Derkalas, perhaps a traitor to him. And Carthis! She whose black hair was like the curtain that held the stars, with eyes that were pools of night that held the answer to his youthful dreams. Surely the stories he had heard could not be true. He had to find her and take her in his arms again and know that what had sustained him through five years of labor on the canals was still there in her heart.

The people who called his name perhaps did not know that the source of his strength was Carthis. Without her—

ABRUPTLY, a small group of imperial guards burst upon

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his path from the ruins of a large building. They were pushing before them a group of half a dozen Hamarians — two young women, one yong man, an old man, and two teen-aged boys. Following in their wake was a blind beggar priest, one of those outcast mendicants who worshipped the forbidden, invisible god, Jehnthavas. He was muttering strange words after them, which no one paid any attention to.

Garthanas stopped in the middle of the narrow street, a tall, broad-shouldered figure, tattered, dark-visaged, battle-scarred. The slave brand on his forehead glistened in the pale light of the distant sun, but his brown eyes glistened with an inner fire of their own as he watched the scene before him. Those refugees who had hurried past him stopped to look back. Those who had entered the narrow street ahead of him paused to see what would happen.

There were four guards, sturdy, well-fed emissaries from Muthark. They were beating the older man who tried to argue with them, and his head was bleeding. One of the boys was limping, holding a bleeding knee, but they pushed him onward so that he would fall, and they would kick him, forcing him to get to his feet again. His young mother, at his side, was crying and trying to help, all the while she called upon her household gods to rescue them.

Suddenly, she saw Garthanas standing there, and in her desperation she called out to him. She lunged forward, saying his name, and fell at his feet, clutching his legs, begging for aid. Then, just as suddenly, she realized what she had done. In the eyes of her people it was a selfish thing, to bring official attention to bear on Garthanas. She caught her breath and looked up at his face. And he looked back at her without expression, with those constantly narrowed eyes which none could fathom.

There was a deathly silence in the narrow, dusty street.

He looked up at the sky. The Golden Ship, fortunately, was just out of sight beyond the broken line of the buildings. Hamarians stood at both ends of the street. And there were four guards.

They looked him over, startled at first, for they had only heard of his fame. This was their first encounter with him in the flesh. Quickly, they regained their composure and confidence, feeling the muscles in their legs that were accustomed to a world of much heavier gravity. Garthanas had spent years on the smaller world of Hamardeen.

But they forgot the canals—the years of straining at barge lines and drag scoops. That was a gravity of another kind—and Garthanas had been born and raised on Thronas, the greater planet. Moreover, there were certain natural endowments of size and strength—and prowess gained in years of

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battle.

But a freed convict-slave was on probation. One more violation was death.

The guards laughed at him. And the Hamarians hung their heads.

"So this is the great Garthanas!" cried the officer in charge of the detail. "The champion of the Hamarians!" He spat upon the ground and sneered. "It is too bad you are not a true Hamarian—too bad you have served your slave term. It would be good sport to take you back to the palaces of Muthark!"

"Or perhaps he would care to offend us," said another guard, poking his companion with an elbow, "so that we'd have an excuse!"

The officer in charge sobered. He signalled to his men. "Come!" he ordered. "We've no time to stand here and talk to beggars!" Whereupon he shoved the wounded old man forward and they began to proceed onward.

But Garthanas stood in their way, legs spread apart, staring them down with his narrowed eyes.

Astounded, the guard officer stopped, and his men stopped behind him. "Out of the way, harlequin! You tempt me!" He drew his sword.

Garthanas did not move.

"Well? Have you lost your tongue?"

Finally, Garthanas spoke, in low, rumbling tones. "You will let them go," he said.

This might be death for him later, perhaps, but the courage of the people was worth it. They were watching. A legend could not die here in the dust of afternoon. He, as an individual, did not matter. Especially if Derkalas had run away with Carthis, taking the revolutionary army's gold. In bitterness and hate, somehow, there was strength.

The blank expressions on the faces of the four guards suddenly changed to incredulity, then open amusement. They laughed again. The officer raised his sword to strike. The young woman beside Garthanas screamed.

Garthanas had appeared to be slow, which was what really disarmed the guards. Now he moved almost too swiftly for the eye. In one flash of movement, he broke the arm of the officer and grasped his sword. In the next instant, one Thronasian soldier was run through, while the officer screamed with pain, looking aghast at the compound fracture—uncomprehendingly.

The ensuing battle was quickly over. He kicked under their thrusts, parried, thrust, broke them down and killed them. The officer shouted an alarm, but Garthanas struck him a blow across his neck with the back of his hand that broke his voice and choked him. He fell, smothering and bleeding to death.

He stood there for a moment, while the young mother kissed his bloodied hand. Then he made a signal to the watching Hamarians,

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which they knew, of old. The dead bodies were dragged out of sight and covered with rubble inside the broken buildings. The living scattered in grateful silence, refreshed by the living proof of their sacred legend.

"Garthanas walks again in the land!"

He walked onward, but he wondered how long it would be now before they caught up with him—the authorities. Or perhaps the eye of the metal god in the Golden Ship had seen him, after all.

Someone had taken the sword from him, for safe keeping. He could not carry weapons now, according to law. Behind him he heard the blind beggar mumbling in his beard. The old seer was following his lonely footsteps, but he ignored the fact. . . .

HE KNEELED in the rubble inside the roofless house, holding Derkalas' wife in his arms and looking upon her dead face. Young, beautiful, betrayed, and left to die. Her two children lay sprawled on their faces, bodies broken by falling beams — gone from the living world.

The blind, mendicant priest knew, somehow. He was praying almost inaudibly. Garthanas looked up slowly as a man stepped into the enclosure — a dust covered Hamarian. He had been running, and now he was trying to catch his breath.

"Garthanas! They told me you were here—"

He got to his feet swiftly and came to the man, grasping him roughly by the arms in a crushing grip. His eyes were still narrowed as ever, but his dry lips parted, showing even white teeth, and when he spoke the teeth still remained clamped together.

"Where did he go!" he demanded. "And where is Carthis?"

"Gone! Years ago. It's all true, Garthanas, I swear it! He and Carthis went, and with the money they bribed a passage on the Golden Ship. It is said they are on Thronas — even in Muthark, itself . . ."

Garthanas stood there holding onto his old acquaintance, penetrating his eyes and his mind and his heart. He knew it was true—had known it all along. But he had wanted to have it verified by one of the old school, one who would not have reason to tell him lies.

Suddenly, he released his grip with a slight shove and looked up at the sky. Still there was no Golden Ship in sight. He, too, wanted a passage on it, back to Thronas and to the sprawling, power-glutted imperial city of Muthark. But how obtain it without money, and with these glaring scars on his forehead?

"If you need a place to get organized again—" began the other man, but was interrupted by a sign from Garthanas.

"Not now," said the latter. "Leave me alone."

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The Hamarian hesitated, wistfully, but after reading Garthanas' grim face he thought better of arguing. He turned slowly and left, quite oblivious of the blind beggar priest.

Garthanas and the beggar stood there in the afternoon. From afar they heard the continuing song of the Hamarians:

The gods look down and are alone
Where Hamar never shall atone
For Muthark's deadly thrust.
Their dreams of old we, too, have known,
But we are flesh and they are stone,
And Yesterday is dust . . .

Garthanas clenched his fists hard. The cords of his neck stood out and his lips parted again to reveal his gleaming white teeth clenched together. He groaned aloud. And he cursed, shouting at the sky.

"The gods are stone and all is lies! Lies! Lies! Lies!"

"All but one," answered the blind man, "Who is not of stone, but of all things. And of all truth."

Garthanas whirled about and grasped the other's frail arms and shook him. "This, too, is a lie!" he exclaimed. "What is your god if he leaves you blind, aged fool!"

Surprisingly, the beggar showed no fear. He said, "This is but proof of His greater wisdom. He leaves His servant blind so that he may see the light that shines in darkness."

Garthanas looked at the other's unseeing eyes. He had to admit that some courage not borrowed from legend was buoying his spirit up.

"Give me one truth," he said to the beggar, "and I will conquer Thronas."

"Jehnthavas is truth."

Garthanas threw the old man into the dirt. "You lie! There is no truth but power and wealth and influence. Up there in Muthark lies the only truth. Power! The sword of might! It is the only answer!"

From the dust and rubble, the ragged priest answered, "You, Garthanas, are the only sword of your people. Do not desert them for private vengeance."

Silence. Garthanas stood there looking at him and at Derkalas' dead wife and children, whom he planned to burn that night, so that their souls might escape cleanly from the flesh before it rotted and became food for scavenger feather-beetles and thousand-legged snakes.

"If your god hides not wisdom only in his bowels," grumbled Garthanas, "then let him speak one word of guidance. If I am the Hamarian Sword, then let him be concerned and tell me. What shall I do?"

The priest was silent, and Garthanas laughed. "Pray to your beard, old prophet of lies!" He started away in search of faggots for the funeral pyre, but the priest

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stopped him.

"Find you the true mother of your blood," he said, "and Hamar shall be free."

Garthanas tensed, with an awareness of the hair prickling at the base of his neck. Of all the unexpected, uncanny—

"You lie again," he argued lamely. "I knew my mother *and* my father, long ago. They are dead."

He walked away, but the scarred, blind eyes of the mendicant were before him.

THARLANTHIS — the most picturesque town on Hamardeen—colonial resort of Thronasian nobility, headquarters for imperial authority. It was also the perennial location of the main colonial garrison.

Garthanas looked at the town over a jug of liquor, from his vantage point at a table on the stone veranda of the *Imperial*, a cheap, tradesman's tavern with a ludicrously inapplicable name. He had not been known to drink, but now he was indulging. In fact, he was successfully drunk.

The waiters knew him, and the lower class Hamarian customers had at least heard of him half their lives. For the benefit of those who might not be duly informed because of their relatively recent deportation to Hamardeen, Kurdas, the proprietor, whispered his fame among the tables.

But was this that same Garthanas who had led the revolution at the side of his warrior friend, Derkalas, and succeeded in wiping out the imperial forces on the planet only five years ago? Was this the legendary incarnation of the Hamar Kings, of old? Was this lonely, slave-marked, drinking vagabond their sharp-edged Hamarian Sword?

And how was he to pay for his drinks?

There were some who guaranteed Kurdas the price of the drinks. They recalled the days when Garthanas had provided miraculously for thousands of starving victims of imperial usury by ransacking the imperial supply houses under the spear-guns of the Thronasian guards.

Garthanas shut them all from his mind. He was busy drinking in the town with his eyes—and remembering. Up there among the hills were the gleaming villas of Thronasian nobility who often visited Tharlanthis, seeking its tropical warmth after a cold season at home under the darker skies of Thronas. On the slopes was the stone-walled town with its white stone houses and little, flowering roof gardens and scarlet and purple climbing vines. And below, marking the beginning of the equatorial plains, was the great Thamas Canal, named after the present Emperor, wider than the town and reaching north to the polar seas. Three generations of Hamarian slaves had built it. Far out on its muddied surface he could see a

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gray-backed *shalus* towing a barge. The Golden Ship had transported even these great beasts from Thronas.

What would Thronas do without that single, Golden Ship and its miraculous metal god?

But he went back to remembering. It was here that he had spent the happiest and most triumphant six months of his life. After the bloody defeat of the imperial forces, he and Derkalas had established themselves here and received the reward of kings from the victorious Hamarians. And it was here that he had met Carthis—Carthis the dancing girl, who for some mysterious reason would marry no man, but who loved him passionately. There had been nights here under the two moons of Hamardeen, beside the canal—

He called for another drink and the waiter brought it without questioning. And hurried away again. Those narrowed, brooding eyes proclaimed to the world that he was to be left alone.

But Derkalas had run away with Carthis, taking the people's hidden gold with them. They were undoubtedly on Thronas, and he had to follow them. He had to see Carthis once more, at least, before he died. But the authorities had laughed in his face when he asked for passage on the Golden Ship.

Sometimes he wished the Thronasians had executed him instead of giving him only five years of slavery. But they had been too clever to give the Hamarians a martyr to remember. They had treated him like some petty criminal, contemptuously setting him free with a slave-convict's brand on his forehead. He had lived through it all for Carthis, and now she was gone.

He clenched a fist and softly banged the table top, glaring at the canal. Damn! Why did his strength lie with a woman? Was there nothing else?

Yes. Perhaps there was. Hate was a reliable elixir—and a thirst for power. Vengeance and power lay in Muthark, on Thronas. Unless he could get there—

"Hey—you!"

He looked up slowly to see a Thronasian officer standing before him. The insignia of his harness proclaimed that he was only a *sagranus*, having command over twenty men, but he acted like a gold-harnessed *mogrus* who dictated to five thousand. He was big, heavy, but soft. He even had pink cheeks, which was rare for the usually dusky-hued Thronasians.

"You are Garthanas, are you not?"

Garthanas was aware of a sudden silence on the veranda. Many faces watched him.

"Well? Are you too timid to speak?"

Garthanas slowly took another drink from his jug. Then he said, "What do you want?"

"I want you to accompany me to headquarters. You are wanted for

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questioning in connection with the disappearance of four imperial guards."

Garthanas studied the other in silence, still holding his liquor jug.

"Well? Are you a man of sense, or do I prod you along like a *calanthus?*" The officer began to draw his sword.

"Where are your twenty men?" asked Garthanas, with a slow, careless drawl, his eyes narrowing enough to appear sleepy.

"Listen to the egotist!" exclaimed the Thronasian. "Since when does it take more than one imperial guard to bring in a convict-slave?"

The contents of the jug of liquor were in the guard's face almost before he finished speaking. Garthanas moved his feet and flexed his powerful legs in one smooth movement, causing the officer to fall backwards onto the flagstones of the veranda. The customers jumped to their feet in the midst of a startled cry. Kurdas, the fat proprietor, prayed aloud to his gods, beseeching them to protect his establishment from violence.

The twenty men appeared from their hiding places and ran forward, surrounding Garthanas with drawn swords. One of the swords' points rested at the base of Garthanas' neck. Some of the guards helped their outraged officer to his feet.

Garthanas calmly removed the sword point from the region of his neck and got up, towering above most of them. "Now I will go," he said, "since you show me the courtesy of a more worthy escort."

The officer in charge almost screamed in his rage as he wiped the liquor off his face with a towel hastily brought to him by a waiter. "You live only because my orders are to bring you in alive!" he shouted.

Garthanas ignored him and walked toward Kurdas. He stopped before him and his usually inscrutable face softened into a smile of amusement as he regarded the trembling little man. He took time to brush a few crumbs of food from the other's forearm.

"My friend," he said, "return the money of your generous customers. Garthanas pays his debts—even for the poorest liquor."

THEY marched through the narrow, twisting streets of Tharlanthis, and the watching Hamarians were proud to see that every guard had his sword drawn at the back of their former leader. Garthanas was thinking about what lay ahead. Death? Or, if the gods were with him, a trip to Thronas in the Golden Ship. Even as a prisoner it would be worth it—to get to that dark planet. But the chances were very slim.

Suddenly, their path was blocked by a herd of *calanthii*, stupid, long-haired, four-horned beasts of burden also imported from Thronas. They came two abreast, their ponderous bulk filling the width of

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the street, and behind them were many more. On one of them, seated between the great horns, was the herd master, a young, bare-chested Hamarian of perhaps twenty years who recognized Garthanas at once.

While the Thronasian guards shouted commands at the herd master, the latter's eyes met those of their prisoner. And he knew his message had carried.

When the lead *calanthus* lowered its great head, Garthanas sprang to its back—and the herd charged down upon the guards. Garthanas ran across the backs of the *calanthii* and leaped into the air toward a rooftop. He caught the stony edge, roughened by the bark of vines since removed, and pulled himself over. He looked back, then ducked just in time to avoid an arrow from one of the bowmen. When he looked again, the bowman was gone out of sight underneath the herd. Much to his satisfaction, the cooperative young herdsman had taken to cover.

Garthanas ran across the deserted roof garden and leaped into the bushes at the back of the house. Then he took to the hills, where the imperial villas frowned down upon him. At least, he thought, the Hamarians had not forgotten him. They, too, knew how to pay their debts.

But this was the garrison headquarters of the whole colonial planet. It would not take long before a small army of imperial guards would be on his trail. Suddenly, he stopped to look at the sky. He saw the Golden Ship. It was very near, hovering over him, following his course. The metal god was indicating to his pursuers where he was!

Alone up there in the sky, without any men inside, the great ship, capable of carrying several thousand passengers across the great, dark distances between planets, maneuvered itself around with unmistakable signs of efficient intelligence. What other answer than that there was a hidden god inside it? He had traveled on it once, from Thronas to Hamardeen, and there was a forbidden section which no man could enter, not even the highest Thronasian officer or priest. Some had tried and died for their pains.

Now here it was above him, trailing him silently, relentlessly, taunting him. The single, coveted key to Muthark's power. He trembled, not with fear, but in his frustration. He swore, spat upon the ground, knowing how futile a gesture it was. But all was futility now.

He ran onward, up the slopes toward the greatest villa of all. And the Golden Ship followed with consummate ease. Behind him he could hear the shouts of soldiers. The garrison was out to get him, and his time was running out.

He was drawing near to the great villa, which had been built

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a generation ago by Muthark V, the father of Thamas I — but neither emperor had ever visited it. Only certain great noblemen close to the imperial house had come here and enjoyed its extravagant luxuries. But it always had its complement of guards. Soon they would be attracted by the shouting from below—or eventually by the Golden Ship, itself.

But Garthanas knew that villa. He and Derkalas and his family and Carthis had stayed there for many wonderful months, and he was very familiar with its defenses and its passages and rooms. There were secret rooms, perhaps no longer known to even the present emperor, Thamas I — and there were escape tunnels . . .

When he came up under the walls he unhesitatingly began scaling them, taking advantage of generous toeholds between the great stones, plus an occasional vine. He could see the branches of trees projecting over the top and he knew that on the other side was the garden and the artificial lake —a rare thing on Hamardeen.

He topped the wall and took advantage of a large tree branch, which he crawled along. Reaching the shaded trunk, he paused to peer down into the large garden. There were the same, carefully tended flower beds and the placid lake with its floating islands of scarlet tendril blossoms. On a terrace above were the trellised arcades, and beyond them, the sprawling villa, itself.

He heard guards running. One of them appeared directly below him. Without hesitating, he leaped upon him. It was a good twelve foot drop, and the impact stunned the sentry. He fell, and Garthanas procured his sword. The fellow stirred under him and he struck him with his fist, knocking him out. Then he ran for the trellised arcade. Outside the walls, the garrison troops were arriving. He could hear the shouting of hundreds of them.

In the garden somewhere, a guard must have spied him, because there was another kind of shout, and he heard men running toward him. He did not look back. He sprinted up the broad, low steps of the terrace and gained the arcades. Immediately he found himself in an embowered alcove, in the center of which was a naked woman.

He stopped and stared at her. Then he chuckled, in spite of his situation, because it was not actually a woman. It was a statue. But it was the most perfect and lifelike statue he had ever seen. Sculptured exactly to human scale, it was a likeness of a rather frail, angelic type of woman who might have been in her early twenties. There was a virginal, almost sacred aspect about this creation which arrested his flight momentarily. Done in modern technique, it was painted, or dyed, with lifelike colors, including the hair, which was blond. And the eyes, looking at

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him as though they were alive, were clear blue. She was a perfect Hamarian type, which was a very peculiar mystery, considering the fact that this villa belonged to the imperial house of the Thronasians.

But the most remarkable feature about it was the person who had made it. He was certain the sculptor was a man of—of truth! That was it! He created what he saw, without cheating either himself or nature. Both the subject and the artist were people he would like to meet.

But there would be no chance for that now. Guards came from all directions. Well, it was as good a place to die as any. They'd never take him alive. Because Thronas was out of the picture. They'd give him the death sentence, here, on Hamardeen. So rather than die in disgrace he might as well go out in one furious blaze of glory.

Above him, through the branches of the vines over the trellises, he could see the hovering bulk of the Golden Ship. It made him mad because it reminded him of Thronas and Muthark—which reminded him of Derkalas, the traitor, and Carthis, who once stood in this very spot with him and vowed her love.

The first guards to close with him died before an avalanche of rage incarnate. Then a particularly magnificent specimen, a high ranking officer in the prime of his life, pushed through and held the others back. His eyes gleamed in triumph.

"So this is our renegade!" he cried. "For years I have looked forward to this meeting!" He brandished his sword.

The other men stood back, suddenly smug, knowing what their commander would do. And Garthanas knew also, so he closed with the other.

The man was a worthy opponent, in fact dangerous. And he seemed to like his work. Garthanas might have liked it if they had been alone, without hundreds more to drag him down if he won.

Both of them were wounded and the battle was getting hot when there was an interruption. A Thronasian nobleman stepped into the alcove from behind a vine-covered pillar where he had evidently been concealed. The armed spectators of the duel dropped to one knee and bowed their heads. He raised one hand to the fighters.

"One moment," he said, quietly.

The officer lowered his sword and also dropped to one knee, bowing his head. "Down, you fool!" he hissed at Garthanas, who still stood there, legs apart, staring at the newcomer.

The deference of the guards could only mean that this was a member of the ruling household, itself. Imperial royalty. There was only one such person, other than Thamas I, and that was the Emperor's mysterious son, Adamas. The young man did, in fact, wear the imperial medallion on his

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chest, of which there were only two in existence.

So Adamas, Prince of Muthark, had come to Hamardeen.

Garthanas still refused to kneel, however. He had vowed never to kneel to a Thronasian monarch, because the symbology involved was too significant. In bowing there was defeat, and the only kind of defeat he had ever anticipated was death, itself.

He saw before him a pleasantly featured man in his middle twenties, of the dark complexion of the Thronasians. He was somewhat slight of build, but not particularly soft—not soft in the way that meant excessive indulgence in the luxuries of the upper class. The only softness was an identity with the artistic, or the aesthetic—without femininity. He was a man, every inch, but definitely not of the warrior type. Nor did he strike Garthanas as being the sole heir apparent to the mightiest imperial throne in the history of Man. Yet he was a man he could have liked, if his father were not the Emperor, himself.

Prince Adamas signalled all the men to rise, and as they did so, the officer with whom Garthanas had been dueling saluted with his sword.

"Your Imperial Highness," he said, "forgive the disturbance, but we are ordered to arrest this renegade criminal, who is none other than Garthanas, the man who—"

"I have heard of Garthanas," interrupted the prince. He was looking the prisoner over speculatively, with a strangely professional interest.

"With your permission — "The officer laid his hand roughly on Garthanas' arm.

"Tell me," said the prince, "why you chose to duel with the prisoner."

"Your Highness, it has long been my ambition—"

"It has been nothing of the kind," interrupted Adamas, smoothly. "You are backed by hundreds of men. You said your mission was to capture Garthanas, to arrest him, obviously for the purpose of taking him to trial—which will no doubt be a very brief proceeding. Therefore, the only reason for this duel is a taste for exhibitionism."

The officer reddened, not daring to make a retort. But several dozen smiles of grim satisfaction appeared on the faces of men behind him who had been victims of his arrogance in the past.

"Your Highness, I—"

The prince waved an imperial hand. "You will leave the prisoner alone with me," he said. "I wish to question him personally."

"*Alone!*" exclaimed the officer. "But I cannot permit myself the dereliction of duty—"

"I have my own guards here," said Adamas, coldly. "I *believe* I have expressed myself adequately?" His eyes flashed a warning.

Garthanas met the officer's glare

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of hatred with narrowed eyes, but his lips curled slightly in an amused grin.

"I understand, your Highness," replied the officer, "but—may we disarm the prisoner?"

"Garthanas," said the prince, meeting his eyes coolly. "Would you mind?"

Garthanas bowed mockingly, from the waist only, and surrendered his sword to the officer.

"I'll get you for this!" the officer hissed, close to his ear, as he took the weapon from him. Then he briskly saluted Prince Adamas, whirled about, and marched off with his men.

Adamas and Garthanas looked up at the sky, as though thinking the same thing at once. The Golden Ship was still there, as though it intended to remain there as long as Garthanas was present.

"Tell me," said Adamas, as nonchalantly as though he were talking to a fawning crowd of favor-seekers at court, "why is it you allowed this statue to defeat you. I think you might have had a chance to escape if you had not paused so long to look at it."

Garthanas knew the personal guards of the prince were hidden within earshot. Although he was unarmed, he could have strangled the prince in three seconds. But perhaps the metal god in the Golden Ship would blast him out of existence before he could try it. Then on the other hand, he might not want to try it if he had a chance, because he liked the prince, in spite of his political convictions.

"Well?" said Adamas, raising his brows.

Garthanas looked at the statue of the beautiful, frail young woman. "Because," he said, "it is truth written in stone." As an afterthought, he added, "And truth is rare."

"Aha!" Adamas fairly beamed with sudden enthusiasm. "Do I hear true wisdom? But wait—you are drunk."

"Yes, I am drunk, because all is lies—except that statue."

"And that is why you had to stop long enough to study it?"

Garthanas wished he had another drink. "That person lives somewhere," he said, referring to the statue. "Do you know who she is?"

Adamas nodded. "She is my sister."

The shock of that served to open Garthanas' eyes wide, but only for a moment. "How could she be your sister? She is a Hamarian. Besides, no one knew this before. Why should it be a secret that you have a sister?"

"Each race carries the blood of the other in its veins. Sometimes there are pure throw-backs to an ancestor of opposite blood. That is why the two worlds have seldom heard of Yevea. My father despises her, perhaps even more than he despises me."

Garthanas studied the prince closely. "Despises *you*?"

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Adamas smiled. "I am afraid I need a drink, myself. Will you join me?"

Garthanas laughed. "You are a strange prince of Muthark. Why should you drink with a condemned enemy of the Empire?"

"Because—to do the unexpected is refreshing to me. I will not be bound by tradition and routine. This is not exhibitionism. You have your own goal to battle for. I have mine. It is the battle of the individual — for self-determination."

"I can see that your father and you could never see eye to eye."

"What you may think of me just now does not matter, I suppose," said Adamas, "but—" He looked up quickly and stared at Garthanas. "I really have some very good reasons for wanting to talk to you." He smiled in his peculiarly disarming way, a way Garthanas liked, because he smiled with his eyes as well as his mouth. "Let's go have our drinks . . ."

The guards followed them both at a distance along the trellised arcades toward the villa, and the Golden Ship hovered above the place, motionlessly.

THE interior of the villa was far from being what Garthanas had expected. The great halls with their soaring archways and polished stone floors echoed emptily to their passing footsteps. The usual crowd of courtiers and flatterers with their women and servants, the music and the continual banqueting, so typical of the whole *debauched Empire*—all these elements were missing. Prince Adamas was obviously a recluse, preferring the grandeur and assurance of this perfect solitude to all the false friends, treacherous advisers and flesh-yielding concubines without souls that the Empire could offer him. Moreover, the few servants he saw were not Hamarian slaves. He was astounded to see the long-haired, tentacled *qulnii*, the humanoid creatures from Thronas who were usually the servants of slaves.

Prince Adamas was becoming stranger by the minute!

They sat down at a heavy table with a beautifully polished hardwood top. It was on a private little veranda adjoining a room that had been designed for the purpose of dining and dancing. Now that room had been cleared, and in its center was a half finished statue of heroic proportions. From what he could see of it, Garthanas presumed the end product was going to be a statue of a warrior. Ten imperial guards took up positions around the walls of the room and looked out the door onto the veranda where they sat. A male *qulnus* brought them liquor in great, golden cups. Its bulbous eyes surveyed the tattered guest questioningly, but it said nothing.

After a while, Garthanas began to chuckle. He drank deeply of the expensive liquor, and the chuckle

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grew into a laugh that ended in a loud guffaw.

Prince Adamas seemed pleasantly amused. He merely raised his handsome brows, questioningly.

"Fate is unpredictable because it is insane!" laughed Garthanas. "An hour ago I was the object of search for your entire garrison—a despised enemy number one of the Empire. Now here I sit with the Prince of Muthark, himself, drinking his best liquor!" He sobered suddenly, then emptied his cup. He leaned toward the prince. "This is the feast before the execution. Why not get it over with? Why am I here?"

Adamas clapped his hands and the *qulnus* returned to refill their cups.

"You have asked me one pertinent question about the statue in the garden," he said. "You wanted to know the identity of the subject. Now what about the sculptor?"

"The sculptor?" All right. So he'd talk about that virginal looking creature out there with the tender passion written in her blue eyes. It was a pleasant subject, if words were still to be bantered. "I'd say the sculptor was her lover —because no one else could achieve the intimate details—"

Adamas nodded, and quietly he answered, "I am both."

Garthanas staggered to his feet, jarring the table. He was very drunk, but somehow his mind was like a clear light shining in the darkness. He knew both of them were in the same condition, when men speak truth and nothing else. But *this* truth was incredible!

Adamas stared back at him, his head weaving slightly. He was drunk, wanting to get drunker. And neither of the two men was accustomed to drinking.

"You!" Garthanas exclaimed. "You mean—your sister—"

Adamas nodded. "I want to marry her, but the thought is poison to my father. He hates Yevea because her true Hamarian features thwart him. Instead, I am to marry a woman of his own choosing, one Merlanthis, daughter of Gialnis, an ambitious and treacherous wench who could never love me." His fist came down on the table and his eyes flashed genuine anger. "But I grew up with Yevea. That we love each other is no fault of ours. Blame it on the gods, who are of stone, and not to be reasoned with!" He lifted his cup and drank deeply.

Garthanas slumped back onto his ornate wooden bench. This was the strangest day of his life. Bitter experience had taught imperial families to avoid incest and intermarriage, and the priesthood had responded to the situation by saying that the gods forbade it.

The two men studied each other for a long moment, then simultaneously took refuge in their cups.

Why was Adamas telling him all these personal things? The only answer he could arrive at was that

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what he was told did not matter because the prince knew that his lips would soon be sealed by death. This, alone, was logical.

"You see," Adamas continued, "everything I think or desire is opposed by the Emperor. I love my sister. It is forbidden. My life's ambition is to be the greatest sculptor of this age—for there is only one greater, I believe, and he is my teacher—old Zircuth, a wonderful old priest. You'll have to meet him."

Here was a contradiction again. If he was to die, which was obvious, how was he to meet the old priest, Zircuth, who probably lived on Thronas? With firm grip on his cup, he sat there and listened to the rest.

"My father detests the arts, except the art of war. He sometimes cries in his cup because I am not a warrior, then roars invective at me and tells me to get out of his sight. I am practically an exile, myself. Do you know why I am really here on Hamardeen? I am to study colonial problems. I am commissioned to determine reasons for beating the Hamarians into permanent submission in a punitive war that will be planned to break their will forever."

Garthanas tensed, straightening up slowly, eyes narrowing more than ever. Here was a language which was more comprehensible. The jumbled world of his thoughts began to fall back into shape again—even though the shape was menacing. He was used to that.

"But I have done none of that. Instead, I have lived here in defiance of imperial command, devoting myself entirely to the practice of my art." He nodded his head, significantly, toward the unfinished statue in the adjoining room. "As an artist I have learned that there is no greater truth than the bold, clear stroke, whether it be with chisel or brush. Truth is always in defiance of the false norm that each society establishes for itself. The greater the violation of that norm, in terms of basic truth, the greater the defiance, the greater the boldness of the stroke, and hence, the greater the art. I started to make a statue representing the principle of defiance, but I have been unable to go on. You see—" Adamas smiled again. "I needed the proper subject. What greater embodiment of defiance would I find than in Garthanas, the living Hamarian Sword? I knew I had my answer when I saw you fight with Xanthas in the garden today. At first, I had considered Xanthas, himself, but he had only the form, not the spirit. Him I would use to depict animal egotism."

Garthanas' head weaved drunkenly now, but he was mad, down deep inside. "So the stay of execution will be prolonged," he said, "until you have satisfied yourself—with this damned statue. So I'm an artist's model?" He banged his cup down on the table. "Is that all you're good for? If you didn't care

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to obey your father in regard to this war plan against the Hamarians, then you must be against such things. If you are—why don't you do something about it! With your position and all your power—hup!" He took another drink. "You could bring lasting peace— 'n happiness—to everybody. Be greatesh Emp'ror in Hishory . . . !"

Prince Adamas was matching him, drink for drink. "Because it's all a pack of lies—hup!" He lifted his cup again. "No matter what system you set up—hup! Y'can't beat human nashure. Maybe it'd lash in my lifetime—but my sons would weaken with sush big power in their hands. Thash the trouble—hup! Too much power!"

Garthanas reached out an unsteady cup to him, and they clinked the cups together. "Lesh drink to that!" They drank to it.

"Tell you what," continued Adamas. "Lesh be practical. Besh way I can learn about colonial problems is—from th'opposishen. That's you! *You* tell me whash wrong here, 'n then I'll have both sides of th' story—hup!"

Garthanas reached out his arm. The two cups clinked together. And they drank to that.

"'S always two sides to a story, isn't there?—hup! Lishen! I'll do more than that. 'F you play it my way, Garthanash, I'll find a way to make you my teacher—all about war 'n politics. Take you to Thronash—set you up in court."

Garthanas sobered, but didn't show it. Inwardly, he trembled. What were the gods throwing into his lap! But no—he should not deceive himself. The prince was playing with him in his drunkenness. How could an ex-convict-slave and enemy of the Empire be set up in the imperial court of Muthark?

Adamas spilled liquor across his face when he drank now. "The bold stroke!" he laughed. "Who would dream of such a trick!"

Admittedly, it *was* very funny. Garthanas responded to the other's laughter. They laughed, and they drank toasts to each other.

Xanthas and Morkalas, the *mogrus* of Hamardeen, himself, called at the villa at the head of an official delegation. They told the guards they wanted an audience with the Prince. It was of vital importance. They wished to advise his Highness that his behavior was in dangerous conflict with the wishes of the Emperor. He could not harbor the enemy, Garthanas, for long. It was time that he be released to the authorities in charge of military affairs, the authorities being, of course, Xanthas and Morkalas.

The captain of the special guards approached the private veranda with this message, to find his master and the prisoner in question practically rubbing noses together. Each had a hand on the other's shoulder, and they were laughing.

When the message was given,

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Adamas waved the captain away. "Tell 'em I've got the prisoner where I want 'im! I'm makin' 'im give me vital informashun! Go away!"

When the guard left, the two of them put their heads together as well as their cups, and they sang a forbidden song, albeit quite off tune:

"The golden years are dead an' cold
"'N gone are the Hamar Kingsh of old,
"When Thronash was their own —hup!"

THE statue making began. Adamas worked at it two hours each morning and several hours in the afternoon. And while he worked, deftly and confidently, with his bold, clear strokes, he conversed with Garthanas, and the guards who witnessed this conversational game came to wonder who was getting the most information from whom.

For example, Adamas told the real story behind the Golden Ship —as much as anybody except the Emperor knew about it. Generations before, in the reign of Hamar VIII, when the fair-haired Hamarians and the dark-hued Thronasians lived in a semblance of peace together on Thronas, and Hamardeen was not known except as a dim star in the sky, the Golden Ship had come. In it were a fair-skinned golden-haired people of great stature and apparent wisdom, but they were ill with some incurable ailment. Before much contact could be established, these people died, leaving their mysterious ship behind them.

It was a revolutionary leader of the Thronasians, Muthark, who learned the secret of the ship and caused the mysterious metal god inside to obey his commands. With its terrible weapons he soon overthrew the ancient House of Hamar and established the Muthark Dynasty, of whose generations Thamas I was sixth. The coveted secret of the ship was carefully guarded by each Emperor and only handed down to the imperial heir upon the latter's official marriage and ascension to the throne.

It was Muthark II who decided to send out emissaries in the Golden Ship and explore the nearer heavens, and thus it was that they discovered the true nature of the sun, and that their own world was the fifth of a family of planets revolving about it. The first two planets were terribly hot. The third planet, Dlahtasdeen, was almost inhabitable by their own kind, but not quite. It possessed a heavy atmosphere and great oceans and continents and gigantic forests peopled by hairy, man-like creatures and inhabited also by ferocious animals. Moreover, this world was very actively volcanic and generally too hot to live in.

However, the fourth planet was more promising, though tropically warm. This was the little world of

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Hamardeen, which the Muthark Dynasty soon colonized with Hamarians, until they had the majority of them there and then shut them off from the Empire, subjecting them at last to virtual slavery.

Beyond Thronas was the giant, uninhabitable, gaseous world of Kebardeen, possessing many moons; but in that direction lay the great coldness, and the Muthark emperors were satisfied that they had learned enough. Their own world and Hamardeen were the only ones that concerned them. Where the golden people had come from in the first place was a mystery which they were content to leave with the gods.

"But the Emperor is not here on Hamardeen," said Garthanas, one afternoon when they were discussing the subject of the Golden Ship. "How is it controlled in this world?"

"My father believes I am faithfully fulfilling his commission," replied Adamas. "He has instructed the mind of the ship to answer my commands, primarily, and the commands of Morkalas secondarily." He paused with chisel and hammer in mid-air to smile at his subject. "You see, that is why it is not as ridiculous as it seems for me to entertain such a 'dangerous' renegade in my household. If you made an attempt upon my person, the blue ray of the ship would turn you to dust."

Garthanas grinned, wryly. "And you knew I was aware of that fact. However, without that threat I still would not try it. May all Hamarians forgive me—but I have grown to like you."

"Oh come now! Where's that defiance I need?" He pointed to his towering statue. And they both laughed, while the guards frowned.

IT WAS that same night that Garthanas' growing hopes for a chance at Thronas were blasted into ruins and he was left in a bitter, disillusioned mood, ready to commit murder.

From his second story room in which he was locked nightly, apparently to appease the guards, he overheard a conversation that changed his plans. His room was a bartizan type of structure which jutted out above that private veranda where he had sat with Prince Adamas on the day of his arrival at the villa. It was late at night. He was awakened by the sound of voices raised in heated argument. Without igniting his oil lamp, he went to the window and listened. Below him in the light of Hamardeen's nearer moon, he could make out two dark figures, one of which was certainly that of the Prince, himself. The other, it developed, was Morkalas, grand *mogrus* of the entire colonial garrison.

"But I insist, your Highness," he heard Morkalas say, "that this conduct on your part will bring the most serious disfavor upon all of us from the Emperor when he hears about it!"

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Garthanas heard Adamas chuckle. "Perhaps, then," said the latter, "I should let you in on my little secret. You see, I am not as naive and insensitive to the best interests of the Empire as my father might have the Military believe — because as a matter of fact I know he is actually reluctant to relinquish the throne to me when, or *if*, I ever get married. To be brief and to the point, I naturally agree that this Garthanas is an enemy to the Empire and must be executed."

Garthanas tensed painfully, and a cold sweat began to ooze out of him as he listened, incredulously, with the sickening fever of rage rising to his head and making him dizzy with the itch to commit murder. More than he hated the prospect of death, he despised treachery and untruth. And this was the epitomy of it. All that unctuous pretense of comradeship—the bold stroke, indeed! His fists clenched in anguish and frustration.

"If I had left it solely up to you," Adamas was saying, "you would have executed him at once and that would have been the end of it. But I saw in him a valuable fountain of information — precisely what I came here to get. By gaining his confidence, I can squeeze more frank revelations out of him pertaining to Hamarian sentiment toward the Throne than you could by the most ingenious torture."

Now Morkalas chuckled. "I humbly beg your Highness' forgiveness in that case. This is the neatest trap I have yet seen devised. Then there will definitely be an execution?"

"Of course! As soon as I have finished his statue—which, ironically enough, will be his tombstone."

"By the gods! This will go down in history!"

"I'll give you an execution worthy of history," said Adamas. "I'll have a special amphitheatre prepared, and you may bring the Hamarians to see it. Xanthas has little love for the renegade. Let him be 'master of ceremonies.'"

Garthanas could not listen to the rest. Even if he had tried to hear more, the roaring of his pulse might have deafened him to the sound of their voices. He paced the floor, while his nails bit into his palms.

As time went by, emotion was replaced by the keen reasoning of the man who had become a symbol of hope for the Hamarians. The statue, he reflected, was not yet finished. From the looks of it, he still had eight or ten days left. That would give him time to plan an escape and at the same time fight fire with fire. If the Prince was so sure he was going to die, then perhaps there was a good deal of information about the secrets of Empire he would be willing to divulge to a condemned man.

And after the Prince had divulged enough—he would die.

Garthanas smiled grimly to him-

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self in the darkness. Two could play this game as well as one.

But he did not feel elated. Instead, he was bitter. Was there no one on the two worlds that he could believe—ever? Did one have to adjust himself to an unbroken pattern of lies? If so, then there was only one truth, which he had observed before. Wealth, influence, might — power. The only reality.

He ignited a small tallow later on, to see the small stone figure of Hamras, the pot-bellied god of the villa household, grinning at him from a niche. It was as good a god as any. He kneeled before it and vowed. He took an oath to renounce all things save one truth, which was wealth and power.

When he raised his head to look into the diminutive, grinning face, however, he seemed to see the sightless eyes of the old mendicant priest staring out of the shadows of the niche. And he remembered his words: *"Find you the true mother of your blood . . . and Hamar shall be free."*

Angered because he was strangely frightened, he dashed out the candle.

He could not sleep. He lay on his cot while the light of the farther moon began to drift across the circular wall of his room. He tried to remember the details of his youth and childhood.

He recalled the woman whom he had known as his mother, and the man he had considered to be his father. They were Thronasians, the father being some sort of government official of minor category who had been sent to Hamardeen. There, during Hamarian uprisings, they had been killed, and he had lived an adolescent life among Hamarian warriors, finally adopting them and their cause as a part of him.

But something bothered him before that time. There was a vague, distant memory of some strange condition existing before he knew his supposed parents. Something about living among slaves and the tentacled, hairy *qulnii*, on Thronas. The dimmest memory of all was that of a kindly priest and something shiny that hung from his neck. He caught a vision of himself as an infant, reaching up to play with that shining object dangling from a golden chain, and the priest smiling at him.

Then, somehow, there was a change. The priest was removed from his life. He remembered — cruelty. He had run away to find his father and mother. After living among slaves and *qulnii*, he had found them, apparently. They were kind to him, and later they went to Hamardeen, on the Golden Ship, when he was a boy of fourteen. It was during that trip that he had first heard about the mysterious metal god that ran the ship.

Garthanas cursed the beggar priest for being a feeble-minded liar. Finally, with plans for the murder of Prince Adamas taking

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shape in his mind, he fell asleep. He dreamed that he blew the Golden Ship to pieces with the Hamarian's only secret weapon—a black powder which exploded violently when ignited. And then the black powder became the key to Empire.

WHAT he did not really wish to believe was confirmed before his eyes within the next few days when he saw preparations being made for the promised amphitheatre in which he was to be executed. They were clearing a space at one end of the villa below a low line of bluffs that marked the top of the hills. Adamas explained that a site was being cleared for an addition he wanted to make to the building.

The statue went on, and Garthanas posed for it, attempting to act as though he knew nothing of the facts. Often he had to suppress a sneer of contempt, however, when Adamas would hum happily to himself or talk to him in the tones of almost intimate friendship.

He was entertained with a rather personal history of the imperial household. Thamas I had had an elder brother, Romuth, who was, according to Adamas, a sadistic moron. It had been broadly understood that the law of primogeniture would be broken in the case of two sons, and that Thamas, the younger, would succeed Muthark V to the throne. On the basis of this, a certain royal house offered its coveted daughter, Gialnis, in marriage to Thamas, and the two were very much in love.

However, in a fit of momentary insanity, on his deathbed, Muthark V changed his mind, and Romuth the Moron ascended to power. Gialnis was still willing to marry Thamas, but her parents withdrew the offer. Thamas became very embittered over this experience and went elsewhere to set up his own household. He married, and there was a very great mystery surrounding the mother of Adamas and Yevea, inasmuch as she died in an earthquake at the time of Yevea's birth. They lived, at the time, in a distant, secluded villa in the land called Aralanthas, and inasmuch as Thamas maintained a harem of some five wives, the four survivors of whom were put to death to conceal the secret, Adamas and Yevea grew up with no knowledge of their real mother. Whatever lay behind the secret only added to Thamas' bitterness. He became a ruthless young tyrant.

During the first Hamarian wars, Romuth the Moron succeeded in getting himself killed, and Thamas finally gained possession of the throne—*and* the secret key to the Golden Ship. During the reign of Thamas I, he still maintained the old villa at Aralanthas, which was affectionately known to Adamas and Yevea as Hedenas. There they passed the happiest time of their

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lives as children, under the tutelage of old Zircuth, the priest of the family gods. And it was Zircuth who inspired Adamas to be a sculptor, by his own magnificent examples in stone and clay.

Yevea, with her fair skin and blue eyes and blond, Hamarian hair, was a thorn in the side of Thamas, the Emperor, her father. He never allowed her to visit the imperial city, Muthark, but instead forced her to remain at Hedenas, a virtual prisoner and servant. That Adamas and Yevea loved each other was accepted by the two of them as inevitable. What they were going to be able to do about the situation, however, was another matter. Adamas planned to wait for a solution until after his own ascension to the throne, which would happen when or if he married Merlanthis, his father's choice.

Garthanas did not care what Adamas decided to do in regard to his private love life, since the distasteful stigma of incest attached to the whole discussion was something to be expected from the debauchery of the rulers of Muthark. His mind was busy with plans of his own.

In fact, there were some nights when he succeeded in getting out of his room, thanks to the aged condition of the bars on his window. But each morning he was always present to model again for his intended tombstone. . . .

THERE came the day when Adamas finished his work. It was a magnificent statue towering impressively above their heads. The musculature was superb and the face appeared to glare at the universe in an almost godly expression of defiance. When Garthanas knew the work was done, he was maddened by the apparently sadistic efforts of Adamas to prolong the suspense. The prince continued to touch up almost invisible flaws, as though the whole thing were actually a labor of love, after all.

Finally, he could stand it no longer. "Why don't you stop!" he exclaimed. "You know the thing is finished!"

"I know you must be tired standing there," returned Adamas evenly. "We have worked unusual hours this morning. Well—" He stood back from his work and regarded it proudly. "What do you think of it?"

Garthanas stood there in silence. He was not looking at the statue. He was looking at Adamas and wondering how any man could be so calloused and still be human. He kept thinking: You're going to die, Prince of Muthark. It was the only thought that could give him control of his hatred now. The plan that he had presented to his followers on those nights when he was supposed to be in his room could not fail now. He prayed to all the gods he could recall that they would be ready in time—and

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not lose their courage at the last minute in the presence of the Golden Ship.

But he could not make the mistake of giving the appearance that he knew of the other's treachery. He forced himself to admire the statue.

"I am flattered," he said, at last. "Again, you have written truth into stone. It is an inspiring symbol of defiance. I feel that — even if it should someday mark my grave I could project myself through it and continue, in spirit, forever."

At least thirty guards appeared in the room with startling suddenness, and at their head was Xanthas, grinning triumphantly. Garthanas feigned shocked surprise.

"Everyone is his own prophet on his last day," said Xanthas. "You are right, Garthanas. This statue is your tombstone! Men, seize him!"

As the guards sprang forward, Garthanas made a good show of resistance but managed to surrender to them after a few moments of struggle. He looked in shocked dismay at Adamas.

The Prince put down his chisel and hammer and faced the prisoner. There was no smile on his face now. His eyes were as cold as the stone he had learned to shape.

"I have deliberately listened to your subversive drivelings for days," he said, abruptly. "You and your pride and your lofty contempt for the mightiest Empire that ever existed!" He came forward and slapped Garthanas' face with the back of his hand. "Idiot!" he almost shrieked. "What you have told me of the Hamarians I shall use against them! Today your public execution will mark the beginning of their complete enslavement. Take him away!" He waved an impatient, imperial hand at the guards and walked away.

"Adamas!" Garthanas cried out, pleadingly. "You can't betray me like this!"

Xanthas led his men in a loud chorus of laughter. "How talented is the famous Hamarian Sword!" exclaimed the latter. "It can sing, too!"

They took him away to the amphitheatre to prepare him for the execution.

The amphitheatre was now completed outside. The "stage" consisted of a small stone slab at the base of the low bluffs which formed the backdrop, where he was supposed to stand before the spear-gunners. Opposite the bluffs at a distance of some one hundred *talii* (a *talus* being the average height of a man), was the low ridge of the hills that looked down upon Tharlanthis and the broad Thamas Canal. Along this ridge, crude benches had been installed, on which now sat hundreds of Hamarians, under the bows and swords of the Thronasian guards from the garrison. In the center of the amphitheatre, in a position just behind the squad of spear-gunners, was an uncovered pavilion where

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the Prince of Muthark sat in company with Morkalas under the black and gold banner of the Thronasian Empire. The fact that the pavilion was uncovered seemed to have a close connection with the fact that the Golden Ship hovered directly above it at a distance of about two hundred *talii*. Both Price Adamas and Morkalas glanced upward at the huge, gleaming vessel from time to time, as though to reassure themselves of its presence.

When Xanthas and his men brought Garthanas out into the amphitheatre, the low rumble of conversation along the ridge ceased. In victory the Hamarians would have cheered him, but in the imminence of death and defeat they were silent, except for the occasionally audible sound of a woman's crying or someone's prayers to the gods of their people. Ever since Garthanas had surrendered himself to the Thronasians in order to save his friend, Derkalas, defeat had been heaped upon defeat for the Hamarians and they had finally found themselves to be truly a nation of slaves, isolated completely from the home planet, Thronas. Yet while Garthanas lived they had hoped. Now this day was to be the ceremonial termination even of hope. Their great Hamarian Sword was to be broken in dishonor and relegated to the dust of olden dreams forever. Garthanas was going to die.

But still they were proud of him. In his appearance out there he looked like the veritable embodiment of their ideals—tall, powerful, still confident and defiant. In spite of Xanthas and his men, he paused once to survey his audience with his narrowed eyes. And the strange part about it was, they knew he was not trying to draw courage from them. He was trying to *give* it! In the presence of certain death he thought of them.

However, there were some in that audience who smiled grimly back, knowing there was a specific source for his confidence. It was with these persons he had spoken in the dark of the stars down in the woods along the shores of the canal on those nights when he was supposed to be locked in his tower. When they were not grinning at Garthanas they were glaring at Prince Adamas, who was the one who was *really* going to die this day—if they did not underestimate the abilities of the metal god who lived in the Golden Ship.

Prince Adamas only heard half of what Morkalas was telling him about himself. He was preoccupied, watching Garthanas and the crowd on the hill.

"All right!" exclaimed Xanthas, prodding Garthanas in the back with his sword. "Who's the exhibitionist now? That will be enough for your public today. Now get up on that slab!"

Garthanas stepped up onto the slab and turned to face Xanthas. He smiled at him, grimly. "You

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know," he said, "one thing I regret is that we were not able to finish that duel."

"That," replied Xanthas, "is the only sentiment we have in common." Whereupon he turned smartly on his heel and walked toward the spear-gunner squad, ready to take command of the execution.

Garthanas lifted his head to search out the trumpeters. When they lifted their long horns and sounded the blast that announced his time had come, he smirked in secret satisfaction. The fools were giving the cue to his followers, setting in operation his carefully laid plan. Picked personnel would be moving up under the foliage on the hill slopes now, some of them mounted on swift, armored *kruthii,* the scaly-beasts of the deserts which only Hamarian warriors on Hamardeen had dared to ride. They were not permitted in the area of Tharlanthis, so now their sudden appearance would serve as an additional factor of surprise. And the greatest surprise of all, of course, would be the secret weapon, the black, explosive powder bombs which might even catch the Golden Ship, itself, off guard.

He waited there motionlessly for the trumpeting ceremony to end. Conveniently, there was a long, traditional pause between trumpet blasts, to build up tension in the crowd.

Now, at last, he saw a few heads appear here and there along the ridges — unobtrusively, but effectively reassuring him that the plan was under way. *They* were ready.

With a calm eye he turned his attention upon Xanthas, who raised his sword and shouted a command at the squad of spear-gunners.

"Fix spears!"

The dozen gunners placed their long, metal barbed spears in their firing channels.

"Load!"

They braced the butts of their long guns against their right thighs and reached forward in unison, pulling back one set of elastic straps after another, until all had been hooked in place. When loaded, those spears could shoot through the hide of a giant *shalus.* The crowd on the ridge was rising to its feet.

Garthanas looked at Prince Adamas and saw that he, too, had gotten up, and Morkalas stood beside him watching Xanthas. Adamas, however, was gazing curiously at those new heads which had appeared behind the ridge. Very apparently, he was suspicious. He looked up at the Golden Ship, tensely.

"Aim!"

Twelve long spear-guns raised upward to a horizontal position, their shining, heavy barbs pointing directly at Garthanas, only four *talii* distant from them. Slowly, Xanthas' sword arm raised upward for the final command.

Suddenly, a strange, sighing

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sound pervaded the amphitheatre, and a black, smoky streak of something arched outward toward the gunners, from the hills.

"Fire!" shouted Xanthas. But too late.

Ill-timed, but still effective, the rocket bomb exploded just above the gunner's heads, knocking them to the ground, wounding some and scattering others. Simultaneously, half a dozen Hamarians mounted on silver gray, scale-armored *kruthii,* darted swiftly across the amphitheatre toward Garthanas. To this surprise and confusion was added the roar of hand propelled bombs going off as the rescue party on the ridges attacked the garrison guards. Three lonely figures ran hurriedly toward Prince Adamas' pavilion, trailing smoke from fuses. Bedlam smote the place like a hurricane.

Xanthas scrambled to his feet and charged Garthanas with drawn sword just as a snarling *kruthus* approached. Xanthas stepped back, alarmed, but not quickly enough to avoid one of the ferocious scaly-beast's raking talons. He was hurled into the dust, holding his bleeding face.

In that moment, the Golden Ship acted. Three blinding needles of light leapt downward and the three bomb carriers who were intent upon assassinating Prince Adamas dropped dead. Then their bombs detonated, shattering their bodies. Adamas stood there, a hand placed on Morkalas' impatient sword arm, holding him back. He was watching Garthanas.

The six mounted Hamarians milled around Garthanas and he shouted at them, trying to see them through the curtain of dust they were raising.

"Where's my mount?"

"Plans are changed! Behind you —quick!" cried one rider. The *kruthii* were swirling madly about, fighting with each other in a mad tangle of harness, claws and reptilian fangs, accompanied by their blood-curdling roars and piercing screams.

Before Garthanas had time to look, friendly hands grasped him from behind, and he was aware of entering into a tunnel in the bluff. Then the sunlight was blotted out as someone closed a hidden door.

Outside, the Hamarian riders darted away from the execution slab and the crowd gaped. Xanthas and some of his spear-gunners rose up from the dust and reorganized themselves. There before them stood Garthanas, a tall, rigid figure in the swirling screen of dust.

"Aim and fire!" commanded Xanthas.

But before this could be accomplished, Prince Adamas raised his hand in a signal to the Golden Ship. When he pointed at Garthanas, a pillar of blue fire descended on the shadowy figure, and it soon dissolved into dust, along with half the slab he had stood on, leaving a smoldering crater.

"There," shouted Adamas, "is

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the end of the traitor!"

He and Morkalas shook hands in grinning triumph. Then the latter left the pavilion, shouting commands at his garrison troops, who were getting the crowd under control. Xanthas tried to hold the gaping wound on his face together, but in spite of the gushing away of his life's blood, he smiled in grim satisfaction as he looked up at the Golden Ship and at the smouldering crater where Garthanas had stood. Then his men hurried him away to attend to his injury.

Inside the tunnel, the real Garthanas was being hurried along by his unseen rescuers, toward a distant light, where a slim figured girl with long, blond hair awaited them, holding a sputtering torch.

"This way," she said, as they drew near, and without pausing to see if they followed her she led them off down another passage.

Accustoming his eyes to the dim light at last, Garthanas made out two men whom he recognized as being members of the party he had conversed with down by the canal.

"How did this come about?" he asked.

"No time now to explain it," replied one of them. "Ceranthis will tell you. We've got to get out of here!"

"But why were the plans changed? How did you know about this passage? I didn't know it existed, myself."

"Ask Ceranthis. Hurry!"

They soon arrived in subterranean chambers which Garthanas began to recognize as belonging to that series of secret rooms under the villa which he had visited in the old days of his triumph. He followed the slim girl, who wore a purple robe against which her blond hair was a gleaming contrast, guiding him onward. When he turned to question his companions once again, however, he stopped suddenly in surprise. The girl stopped to look back at him.

"They're gone!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she answered. "They had to make good their escape before the guards returned to the villa. Come, follow me. The way is not long."

He took the torch, and she guided him into some larger chambers. The room in which she finally stopped had once been a wine cellar. In fact, there were a few kegs of wine still in evidence in the damp gloom, under ancient, arched niches. There was an old wooden table in the center of the room, a bench, and, against one wall, a great couch, prepared with furs, for sleeping. There was also a supply of food underneath the table.

"Here we are to stay until it is safe for them to come for us," Ceranthis told him.

He looked down at her fair-skinned face and into her wide, clear blue eyes. Her lips were full and soft, such as he had not discovered since—since Carthis had first come into his life. And the years since

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she had last been in his arms had been long. This girl could not have been older than twenty years, at the most. Most likely, she was a virgin. There was a courageous little tilt to her chin that he liked, and her eyes met his in frank admiration.

"We?" he queried, as he admired her hair again and the slimness of the young figure concealed partially by the cloak.

"Yes," she said. "They have sent me to you."

The connotations of that remark were simplified when she suddenly removed her cloak and dropped it upon the ground. Underneath she wore only a single, sheer garment which only emphasized everything that it failed so completely in concealing.

He stood there silently, taking her in with his eyes, not wishing to offend her obvious pride in her beauty.

"Who sent you?" he asked.

The tilted chin came upward as she looked straight into his eyes. "The mothers of your chosen people, who love you, Garthanas. You are our only hope. But if something should happen to you—"

The rest was too much for her. She hung her head, blushing in spite of herself. It was too much for Garthanas, also. If the men had sent an experienced woman, wise in the arts of love, he would have grinned at their masculine consideration. But that the mothers of the land had sent him this virginal creature to keep him company during his lonely wait, even hoping for a son by him, to raise as another Garthanas—it was, in fact, a holy thing. And it blocked him. He couldn't touch the girl.

Slowly, her eyes raised up, searching his. One thing he respected was human dignity. He knew she was proud of her mission. He could not humiliate her. So he played for time. There *were* other things to be considered.

Slowly, he reached down and picked up her robe, handing it to her. On second thought, he draped it tenderly about her shoulders.

"Rare wine is not to be swallowed at a single sitting," he told her, softly. Then he kissed her gently on the lips — and found his metaphor to be not far from truth. The hunger and privations of years cried out to him, but he held on to himself.

She smiled at him gratefully, both for his consideration and the promise that sustained her pride. She went with him to the table and sat down.

"Now tell me," he said, "what this is all about—the change in my plans, I mean. Maybe this is a better plan, as I didn't know about the tunnel leading just to the right spot in the amphitheatre. Who knew about that? How did it happen?"

"It is a mystery," she answered. "Your plan was to ride away on a *kruthus* and have Prince Adamas assassinated."

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"That's right. But the Hamarians did not even bring an extra mount for me, and I am not sure they succeeded in killing the prince."

"Well, after you had talked to the men and gone back up here to the villa, another man came and also talked about saving your life."

"Another man! Who?"

"That is the mystery. We do not know. He came heavily cloaked and his face was covered at all times. He said he found it necessary to conceal his identity in order not to be openly involved in the affair, but that he was concerned about your safety and offered a safer plan—one that would insure your safety and not cost the Hamarians so many lives."

Garthanas' eyes narrowed. "Was he in favor of saving the life of the Prince?"

"He knew nothing of that part of the plan—about killing Prince Adamas—because the men didn't tell him. They thought he might be some sort of spy until he took them over the hills and showed them the secret passage and allowed some of the Hamarians to stand guard in it. And then when he showed them the—"

There was an interruption as a man suddenly burst into the room. He had been running, and now he stood there panting, with drawn sword, glaring at the two. Garthanas sprang to his feet.

"Adamas! They didn't kill you! But I shall!" Even while he shouted, he picked the heavy table up in his hands and hurled it at the prince, knocking him down and stunning him. He then ran over to his side and took his sword. The point was at the prince's heart when the latter opened his eyes.

"Wait!" he cried out. "One last word, Garthanas!"

Ceranthis stood in the middle of the room, her cloak drawn tightly about her, waiting for the kill, aware of being present at a historical moment. Her eyes were bright with tense excitement and triumphant pride. This was to be the end of a Thronasian tyrant.

"I'll not slip again in the oil of your words," said Garthanas, not moving the sword point from the other's chest. "If you must speak in vain—speak!"

"It is I who saved your life," said Adamas. "I who disguised myself and went down to the canal at night to speak to your men—because it was known to me you were getting out at night and plotting something. You must have overheard my conversations with Morkalas, which you should have recognized as a ruse. I had great plans of my own, which your plans might have ruined. What do you think was behind my short working hours when I made the large statue of you? In the rest of the time I was down here in these rooms making a life-sized likeness of you—a hollow one of reeds and clay, so that a few men could handle it easily when the time came—"

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"Garthanas!" exclaimed Ceranthis. "It is true! I was about to tell you of the statue. When you were drawn into the tunnel they pushed the statue out, and the cloaked stranger promised that this statue would be destroyed so that everyone would think they saw you die!"

"Xanthas was about to have the gunners fire at it," said Adamas, "but I couldn't risk having their spears bounce off it, so I signalled the ship. The blue ray turned the statue into dust, and Morkalas, standing beside me, was thoroughly convinced he had seen you die. To all the world, aside from those who knew this plan, you are now dead. It is my plan to smuggle you back to Thronas and —"

The sword point swerved away, and Adamas felt himself dragged to his feet as though by a metal winch. Garthanas' grip on his arm hurt, but he withstood the pain patiently. He met the larger man's narrowed eyes and could almost feel him probing into the depths of him.

After a long moment of silence, Garthanas shouted one word. "Why?" He shook the prince and shouted again, even louder. "*Why!*"

Prince Adamas looked at the girl, hesitantly. "I have plans, Garthanas. Trust me. You will find them to your liking."

Garthanas removed his hand from the prince's arm, and the latter rubbed the spot in relief.

"All I want is your promise to get me to Thronas," said Garthanas. "Tell me what you wish after that and it will not matter whether it is truth or lies!"

"The Golden Ship leaves tonight," said Adamas. "We shall both be on board, and you will be well concealed."

Garthanas' scarred brow furrowed. "But once on Thronas, what about this?" His finger pointed to the slave brand above his eyes. "It will mark me wherever I go."

"I have thought of that, too. Old Zircuth, the priest I told you about, has medical friends. There is a substance which will pass for new flesh, once fastened to your forehead. You can grow a beard, your dress can be changed. No one will suspect."

Ceranthis ran forward and kneeled before the prince, kissing his hand. "Thank you!" she said. "This will be happy news to bring to my people, that the great Prince of Muthark—"

"Silence!" commanded Adamas, frowning at her. "You will tell no one where Garthanas went. You will tell them he was discovered here and was killed. Even the Hamarians must think he is dead!"

The girl rose to her feet, paling suddenly. She looked at Garthanas. He thought for some moments and then smiled at her, nodding.

"He is right," he said. "Each extra person who knows a secret is a fragile link—because the flesh is weak, and there is always one who can at least be tortured into tell-

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ing the truth."

"Even you," said the Prince, indicating the girl, "are one weak link in the chain. Besides myself, you are the only one who will know Garthanas is alive and on Thronas. Actually, what is involved here is a grave concern of empire. One wrong word, and the hopes of a thousand future years are fallen into dust. Were it not for your mission to spread the lie that he is dead — you should be willing to seal your lips with death, here and now."

Ceranthis shrank from the prince, drawing her breath in sharply. Garthanas frowned in thought.

"Prince," he said, "have you money on your person?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Will you give me a dozen or so golden *galunii*? I wish to talk to this girl alone."

Doubtfully, the prince withdrew from his belt a leathern pouch and produced a handful of small golden coins. Garthanas took them and turned to Ceranthis. He led her by the arm into one of the tunnels that gave exit to the hills.

When he had her alone, he placed both his hands on her small shoulders and looked into her eyes. The gold coins he had already deposited in the pocket of her cloak.

"Ceranthis," he said, "it was a brave and beautiful sacrifice you were about to make."

She tossed her hair back over her shoulder and looked up at him proudly. "It is a privilege which has been denied me," she stated, boldly.

He smiled, looking at her lips, then back into her eyes. "Let us say we are as close as if—as if you bore my child. I want a sacred promise from your lips."

She waited, looking up at his strong face wistfully.

"For the sake of the future of our people, never breathe a word of the truth even to your own mother."

At once she said, "I promise!"

He drew her to him slowly. He kissed her as he really wanted to, and her arms went around his neck, while the cloak dropped to the ground. He held her tightly for almost a minute and when he released her there were grateful tears in her eyes. He picked up the cloak and drew it around her.

"Tell those mothers of Hamar who sent you that I died praising their names."

Ceranthis turned to go, but the coins tinkled in her pocket. She stopped, looking at him. She withdrew the coins from her pocket and held them out.

"What is the purpose of these?" she asked.

"It is a weakness of mine," he smiled. "I always pay my debts."

Ceranthis flushed, angrily.

"Not to you!" he exclaimed, hurriedly. "But to Kurdas, the proprietor of the *Imperial*. Tell him I had sent the money to him before my execution, but that it was de-

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layed in being delivered."

Ceranthis studied the coins. "Is that so important?" she asked.

He grinned. "I said—it's a weakness of mine. I always pay my debts—even from the grave." He thought of what he owed Prince Adamas and the Hamarians for saving his life—and then he frowned, thinking of something else he owed to Derkalas and Carthis for what they had done. "It's an excellent habit, Ceranthis," he added, "when it is applied, especially, to debts of a graver nature."

He turned about and left her alone in the tunnel.

HE almost suffocated inside the great, leather trunk, in spite of the airholes—especially when the Golden Ship began to accelerate on its way outward into the deep ocean of darkness between the worlds. After his wild years riding armor-scaled *kruthii* across the plains and deserts of Hamardeen, and after those long years exposed to the elements while working on the canals, this close confinement caused him to suffer from claustrophobia. He fought back the terribly insistent inclination to cry out, to burst out of his bonds and fight—because the stakes were too high, just getting to Thronas was reward enough.

And then there was that strange madness afflicting Prince Adamas, who wanted to take the greatest Thronasian enemy back home with him and even set him up in power beside himself, within reach of Muthark and the Emperor. He had not yet explained why, and Garthanas ached to know the answer.

Finally, after what seemed a lifetime of torture, the top of the trunk was removed, and he blinked his eyes to accustom himself even to the dim night lights of the imperial suite on board the ship. Prince Adamas, in black, gold-emblazoned robe bearing the emblem of the House of Muthark, smiled down at him.

"You may be dead to everyone else," he said, in a low tone, "but your stomach is probably saying you are very much alive—and hungry."

Garthanas struggled to rise, his limbs half asleep. He sat up and shook his head, angry at his momentary weakness. Now that Adamas had mentioned it, he *was* hungry.

"How long have I been in there?" he asked.

"Perhaps three hours."

"Three hours! It seemed like three days!"

"Shh! Keep that *calanthus*' voice of your down! Come—follow me."

"How many men are on board?" He put his legs out of the trunk and onto the floor.

"About eight hundred, including four or five hundred Hamarian slaves."

Garthanas grimaced darkly and followed the prince.

Here in this spacious suite of

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many rooms — originally designed for the mysterious chiefs of the dead people who had built this ship—he could discern already the influences of the excessive wealth and luxury of Muthark. The metal floors were covered with rare furs, fastened down in a clever invisible way so that they would not move from their places when the grip of the worlds faded away from the ship. Each item of furniture was also fastened down —great, long couches and ornate tables and benches, some of them inlaid with precious metals and even jewels. But the biggest luxury of all, of course, was the magic light that only the Golden Ship provided. You pressed little buttons on the walls and a light brighter than day pervaded the rooms, wherever you wanted it. Anywhere else one would have had to find his way by the light of a sputtering oil lamp, yet here, not only was there an inexhaustible supply of light but there was no smoke, and everything could be kept as clean and spotless as the sacred temples of Shivathis, the Goddess of Creation.

Or you could turn another little button and keep the lights dim as they were now during the period chosen for sleep. Illumination was one of the few items controllable by the hands of Man on board the Golden Ship. How it propelled itself or where its power came from, or even how it supplied them with air—all this was a question which generations of men had learned to leave to the metal god that was the invisible master of the vessel. For those who had sought to enter the metal god's domain to seek an answer to these mysteries had died.

"You're going to have to get used to a thin diet," said Adamas, as they came into the luxurious dining room of the suite. "I can't appear to have an abnormal appetite, and it would arouse suspicions for me to dispose of enough food for two men."

Garthanas slid his big frame gratefully onto the bench before the table and drew the dish of liquid cheese and cereal toward him. There was also bread and wine and a little baked meat, plus chilled, crisp bloodfruit from the villa's gardens on Hamardeen. He had often known times when he had had to suffice on much less.

"Where are your slaves?" he asked, as he ate.

"It is known to be a tradition with me that I have no slaves—only servants in the form of *qulnii*." Adamas sat down opposite him and took a little wine. "However, when we get back to Thronas, I'm going to have to change my policy."

"What about the *qulnii*? How can you keep them from knowing I'm here?"

"They'll have to be watched carefully. Some pretend not to have learned our speech. Some pretend to be loyal to only one person. But they are unpredictable.

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You never know what they're going to do."

"Am I going to have to stay in that trunk during the entire voyage?"

"Of course not. I'll fix up my private study for you and tell the *qulnii* to keep out of there."

"Well, so much for that. Now then, what's this about your changing your policy? In fact, why am I here at all? What is the plan behind your saving my life and bringing me to Thronas — and making everyone think I'm dead?"

Prince Adamas took a big swallow of wine. Then he took a big breath and sighed, studying Garthanas for a long moment before he spoke. "Will you admit that I have been instrumental in saving your life?" he asked.

"Naturally. Not only that, you are making it possible for me to get to Thronas, which is more than life to me."

"Why?"

Garthanas went on eating. Finally, he answered, "That is a personal story. Let's stick to yours."

"All right. Then if you agree that I have saved your life you will also agree that you are indebted to me."

Garthanas looked at him, not answering.

"I want you to pay that debt here and now by making me a sacred promise," said Adamas.

"What promise?"

"That whatever I tell you this night will be buried in your mind and never be divulged to anyone, until our goals have been reached."

"I'm not sure of *your* goals, but I'll promise to be quiet about anything you want me to keep as a secret."

Adamas leaned forward, his clenched fist hitting the table with mild emphasis. "The future of all Mankind depends upon that promise. What I am going to tell you cannot be told to anyone else!"

"All right. I'm listening." Garthanas fortified himself with wine.

Adamas joined him. Then he said, "I'll make it brief. You may be either astonished or shocked by what I am going to say, but let me finish. Save your comments for later. Now brace yourself. I believe that my father's policy is wrong and I intend to change it, to the benefit of all living men on both worlds, with your help."

Garthanas reached for the wine flask with a trembling hand. He drank deeply. His narrowed eyes watched the Prince, but he said nothing. He listened, as he had never listened before.

"My trip to Hamardeen has awakened me to the fact that I have been asleep, mentally," said Adamas, swiftly. "Knowing you and talking with you has also helped me tremendously to be convinced of certain principles which were instilled in me in my youth by Zircuth, the priest of whom I told you. Zircuth is a great man in spite of his drunkenness and his secret moods of brooding despond-

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ency. I am glad I have always remembered his philosophies and theories of government, some of which are radically original. When I saw the conditions on Hamardeen, I knew that they were applicable. I understood, at last, why I could never become enthusiastic about the tyrannical policies of my father.

"The entire system is terribly wrong. It is wrong, and it always shall be wrong, for one major section of humanity to have *all* of the power and the other to have none. Overbalance of power not only leads to tyranny—the step beyond it is anarchy and dissolution. On the other hand, the healthiest social balance is to give equal rights and powers to two sides and let them police each other. Zircuth and I both have envisioned some sort of representative council of the people whereby all this will be accomplished.

"When I ascend the throne, I intend to reinstate the Hamarians as free men, to abolish human slavery forever. Now that will precipitate alarm and confusion and I will meet with resistance, but if I have strong leadership for the Hamarians in the imperial court I may have a chance of convincing the Thronasians. What more powerful stroke can I make than to resurrect Garthanas, the Hamarian Sword, in their midst just at the proper moment?"

Garthanas sat there without eating or drinking. But he sweated in spite of the perfect air conditioning. His eyes had narrowed to slits.

"But my reasoning goes deeper than this," continued Adamas. "My father, Thamas I, does not consider me to be fit timber for an Emperor. He bemoans his fate that he has no other son. The fact that he has only myself as an heir apparent has given him some sort of a complex that has embittered him terribly. However, for this very reason I know that he would bend over backwards to meet me halfway if I showed any willingness to slant toward his own imperialistic policy. Therefore, as a temporary camouflage, I am going to appear to take an interest in his way of life.

"You see, I've got to assure myself of getting hold of the secret to this Golden Ship. To obtain that secret I must become Emperor, and as things stand now my father might break the old traditions and withhold it from me if I don't show promise, according to his own evaluations.

"So in regard to yourself—I am going to have you disguised and then pretend that I have brought back from Hamardeen a specialist in Hamarian affairs and a military expert—a first class Thronasian warrior. Under you I am going to take lessons in the arts of war, including fencing. I never was much good at that, because I never could understand killing. This maneuver should attract my father's favor, and once that is assured I should

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be able to advance you upward in power, influence and wealth to the point where it would be logical for me to make you my personal adviser, which will be the final step in preparation for my coronation and the big surprise.

"In the meantime, you may stay with me and Yevea and Zircuth at the villa in Aralanthas.

Abruptly, Adamas stopped talking. He and Garthanas looked at each other for perhaps a minute without speaking.

Finally, the Prince of Muthark observed something he had never expected to see. Garthanas, the powerful, battle-scarred scourge of Imperialism, hung his head and shook, silently. Deep inside himself he was sobbing, without tears.

For the Prince, this was a more eloquent and convincing answer than he could have hoped for. It was a dangerous game which only real men could play; in fact, Garthanas was the only partner he could have chosen in all the universe.

GARTHANAS did not discuss the matter with Adamas. It was as though this totally unexpected discovery of all his unutterable dreams in one basket had left him speechless. In a sense this was true, because the overwhelming magnitude of his thoughts and feelings in regard to the whole plan of Adamas was beyond the scope of words—at least for Garthanas, who yearned more for expression in the form of action. Both men understood each other in this respect, and in their prolonged silence they found a companionship of minds on a deeper level than might have been probed by conversation.

One night Garthanas sat alone in the study which Adamas had prepared for him. The curtains were drawn across the entrance of the room, blocking out a view of the rest of the suite. It was the period of sleep, but he was wide awake. He sat lightly on his bench at a table, idly tossing a small dagger into the air and watching it fall slowly back. The ship was far out in those unknown regions of the star-sea where the grip of worlds was weak. The road was long to Thronas. He waited impatiently for the journey to be over, his mind wrestling continuously with thoughts and ramifications of thoughts connected with past and future.

To all but Adamas and Ceranthis he was dead—yet in reality he was only beginning to live. He felt giddy whenever he fully grasped his situation and envisioned himself swinging on a new and mightier pendulum of Fate, in breathless surging across a measureless gulf between ultimate perdition and epic glory.

Suddenly, the curtains parted, and he looked up to see a male *qulnus* standing there on its curiously formed, triple-taloned feet, its tentacled arms writhing ner-

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vously and its lifeless looking bulbous eyes regarding him accusingly. This creature was a large member of its species, three-quarters as tall as Garthanas and weighing almost as much, taking into consideration its long, thick coat of gray and reddish hair, which Nature had given it to protect it from the deep cold of the ice continents existing in the northern and southern hemispheres of Thronas.

"Well?" queried Garthanas, resting his forehead against the palm of his hand to conceal the tell-tale slave brand. "What do you want? What are you doing here?"

The *qulnus* pursed its mouth laboriously to form words in the human speech—a mouth that was slit in a leathery face, without lips, and handicapped by a murderous looking incisor beak just inside. "Yu—Gar-tanas," it said, in a deep-throated, rasping tone that simulated a growl.

Garthanas got to his feet so swiftly that he went a foot off the floor in the light gravity. He landed on the floor lightly, legs apart, and caught his dagger in a better grip, glaring at the *qulnus* with his narrowed eyes. No need to hide his scar now, he reasoned, inasmuch as he had already been identified.

"How did you know that?" he almost hissed at the hairy creature.

A hook-ended tentacle reached up and the *qulnus* tapped its own forehead, significantly. It knew about the scar.

"I am sorry," said Garthanas, starting toward it. "You should not have recognized me. Unless you have been ordered by Adamas to come here—"

The *qulnus* stared sullenly at the dagger in Garthanas' hand. Then it turned and ran.

Garthanas followed it, trying to govern his muscles so as not to sprawl out in the air. He cursed, wishing for normal gravity. The *qulnus* seemed to be more of a space veteran than he. It made rapid progress across the richly carpeted floors and headed for the exit to the suite.

"Adamas!" called Garthanas. But there was no answer. The Prince was elsewhere on the ship, in spite of the hour, which was unfortunate.

In fact, if the *qulnus* could not be stopped it would be calamitous. All his reasons for living now hung in the balance as the creature reached the exit and fled. It *had* to be stopped.

Pausing briefly to wrap a cloth around his forehead to conceal the scar, he went to the exit and looked out. A wide, empty corridor led straight ahead into the depths of the ship. The corridor was empty, that is, with the exception of the weirdly loping figure of the *qulnus*, which ran with the aid of its long tentacles.

Having no other recourse, Garthanas followed the creature, keeping his eye on every doorway that he passed, ready to kill any observer or to duck into one of the entrances if men appeared in the

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passage ahead. The lights were dim, and everyone seemed to be asleep. On this ship there was no need for standing watch, as all slaves were securely locked in their own section and the ship ran itself. A faint vibration could be felt in the deck, reminding all who were awake that the metal god never slept.

The course taken by the fleeing and apparently frightened *qulnus* was a devious one, as though it hadn't the intelligence to realize that widespread alarm would have been its best protection. Each time it darted into a side passage, Garthanas would reach it in time to see it turn off somewhere else, and so he was able to follow it, below the center deck and about it, working gradually toward the bow of the great vessel, racing down spiral ramps, through empty dining halls and lounging rooms, or even between walls, through maintenance hatches, up metal ladders and into chambers filled with weird, glowing instruments that ticked or buzzed at him as he passed.

Once he came to a large room, one wall of which consisted of magical screens where he could see the awful gulf of the star-sea and all its billions of far shining lights. There he could see the growing disc of great Thronas, and beyond it the far mightier but cold and lifeless world of Kebardeen, surrounded by its little family of shining moons. It had been more than half a lifetime since he had beheld this awesome miracle, but now there was no time to observe the stars. The *qulnus* has crossed the room silently and made its exit, stupidly neglecting to awaken some half dozen Thronasian warriors who lay sleeping on the observers' couches below the screen. The men were snoring loudly. Almost holding his breath, Garthanas passed swiftly between them and followed his quarry. He did not know how much longer his luck would hold out—or for that matter, how he would ever manage to get back to the imperial suite without being seen.

At last, however, he caught the *qulnus* in what appeared to be a *cul-de-sac*. Apparently unfamiliar with the forward section of the ship, which was generally forbidden anyway, the creature had run into a passage that terminated in a closed, circular hatch. Here it stopped, with its hairy back against the hatch, evidently unable to open it. It drew back its mouth to expose the shining incisor beak, emitting a rumbling growl, its tentacles poised like great serpents, ready to strike with its knife-like hooks.

Ferocious and tough as the *qulnii* could be, Garthanas knew that there could be no hesitation here. He closed in on the thing, anxious to throttle its loud caterwauling and growling as quickly as possible, before it woke up the whole ship. He feinted with his knife, ducking back from the lashing

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"It drew back its mouth to expose the shining incisor beak, its tentacles poised like great serpents, ready to strike with its knife-like hooks."

hooks on the tentacles. Then he thrust out a long leg and kicked it in the stomach, slamming it against the hatch, eliciting a blood curdling screech from it.

Abruptly, it charged him, grasping him in crushing tentacles and simultaneously ripping his back open with the hooks. Its great beak was near his throat before he pushed with his hands and arms. Then he caught its hairy neck and gripped down hard with all his strength, aware of the terrifyingly tough, leathery muscles of the humanoid which made it seem nearly indestructible.

Suddenly, to his surprise, the *qulnus* fell limp. Its great eyes grew dim as though a light had gone out inside them. It was dead. He hadn't known they were so vulnerable. His dagger was on the floor. He had not even used it.

But there was no time left for conjecture. He heard men running toward the passageway. He knelt down, picked up the dagger, listening.

"It came from here!" he heard somebody shout. "This way!"

Definitely, he was about to be discovered by a large number of men. His only alternative was to try the hatch, which he did, and it swung back like the ponderous door of a tomb—into a cavernous world of semi-darkness and eerie, blinking lights.

The home of the metal god! No

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wonder the *qulnus* had chosen to fight it out with him rather than to enter here!

In a flash the realization came to him that it were better to risk death in a meeting with the metal god than to risk revealing any phase of the secret plans of Adamas. If he, himself, were to die, Adamas might yet succeed, as long as the secret was kept. Gritting his teeth against instinctive dread, he entered the place and closed the hatch behind him, knowing that none would dare to follow even if they should suspect that someone had entered here. He hoped they would think the *qulnus* had been killed by the metal god for approaching too closely.

He waited just inside the hatch, trembling unaccountably. He knew he was not afraid of death. It was that indefinable something which lay beyond death he feared, in spite of himself. A power beyond life and mind—here, lurking in the dim cavern, where a thousand eyes, it seemed, glowered at him resentfully, waiting for him to make one move before cancelling out his life. The danger on the opposite side of the hatch suddenly became as insignificant as a tiny beetle crawling away into nothingness—but this before him loomed upon him like the enigma of Eternity. And all his size and strength and prowess gained in a hundred battles was as dust—meaningless. He sensed a mighty power here that lay far beyond the reach of swords or any violence that Man could inflict. In short, he was in the presence of a real and living god.

A god who was the key to Muthark's power. And he, Garthanas, stood in its forbidden temple.

Well, hadn't he dreamed of such an advantage as this? Hadn't he wished that he might actually visit this place some day and see if he could find the secret? Perhaps, after all, other gods had devised this means of bringing him here. What it that they had placed the cloak of history on his shoulders, guiding him into the channels of victory? He would be undeserving of their special attention if he did not take advantage of the positions in which they placed him. Maybe he was supposed to be here, after all.

Endeavoring to strengthen his morale with this delusion, he straightened up and searched the gloom with his eyes. He saw tier after tier of instrument banks without realizing their purpose. Their dials glowed in the dark, and little signal lights flickered off and on, racing across whole relay banks in a rush of ghostly flashes. He heard whisperings and rustlings and hurried clicking sounds, muffled by depths of wires and tubes and machinery which lay as far beyond his comprehension as the stars.

But in the middle of the main aisle between the dark tiers lay something much more comprehensible and to the point—a crumbling human skeleton. Someone

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else had come before him, searching for the guarded secret of the Golden Ship.

It seemed foolish to take a step in that direction and thus lose his life, yet on the other hand did he have no faith in his destiny? What if it was meant to be? Should the gods who befriended him now have to shake their heads and say he had no faith—that he was a coward, unfit for the important role he played in the affairs of men?

Sweating and calling himself a self-deluded fool, he nevertheless took a few hesitant steps forward toward the dim tiers of tiny lights and glowing instruments—toward the ancient skeleton on the floor. As nothing happened, he took courage and moved with a greater certainty down the aisle.

"Stop where you are."

The command was low in volume, yet it boomed upon him like a powder blast, paralyzing his will. The voice was decidedly not human. It was muffled, metallic, toneless, seeming to emerge out of the air and come from everywhere.

After a while, he found his voice and forced himself to say, "You are —the god of this Golden Ship."

"I am the servant and protector of the leader of men," came the answer.

In a way, that made sense. Thamas I was Emperor, the leader of men. But that this mysterious power denied it was a god—

"You must go from here," said the voice.

Garthanas hesitated, yearning to know more, marvelling at the fact he hadn't been killed, wondering if he were the first to ever hear the voice of the metal god—for no one had ever claimed it could speak to men.

"Go!"

Unable to think of any argument, Garthanas turned to go, then stopped, wondering how he would get back to the imperial suite without being seen.

"There to your left is a maintenance hatch," came the voice again. *"It leads between the walls. Follow the passages to the end of the ship."*

Garthanas felt the hair prickling him at the base of his neck. The metal god could read his mind! No wonder the holder of the key to its power was always safe! He found the hatch, opened it, and reached for the metal rungs inside that led upward—and fled.

It was well he followed this route between the walls, because a trail of blood through the ship would have led the guards to the Prince's quarters.

HE told Prince Adamas about his killing of the *qulnus*, but for some unknown reason he could not bring himself to relate to him his experience with the metal god. Instead, he merely claimed that he had found his way back to the suite between the walls.

Adamas personally dressed his wounds. "They believe that two

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qulnii became curious about the metal god," he told Garthanas. "The story is that the one fought the other to prevent it from entering the place, because of the blood they found on the deck, and both of them must have been killed by the god."

Garthanas winced as medicinal herbs stung the lacerations in his back. "Do you think that story will stick?"

"I believe it will. I have given it my official approval, which absolves the slavemasters of any further responsibility in the matter."

"How can we keep the *qulnii* out of my room? I know it would look strange if you refused to be waited on at all."

"The voyage is almost at an end. Soon we shall be on Thronas."

Soon we shall be on Thronas. Garthanas forgot his physical pains and savored the thought. Thronas —and the promise of all things.

When the ship approached the planet of his birth, Garthanas was able to see it in a smaller magic screen in the Prince's suite. It was not a bright and shining world like tiny Hamardeen, which lay nearer to the sun, but a vast, half-frozen globe swinging through the fringes of the outer coldness—the last of the planets lying within reach of the sun's life-giving rays — its brightest day like graying twilight, its only belt of flourishing life being in its equatorial zone.

He could make out the Belt plainly — a broad area of snow-capped mountains and forested steppes going down to the cold, restless oceans. Above and below this belt were the gray-white jumbles of the ice continents, a no man's land where only the *qulnii* and the other ice-world denizens could penetrate. Still, the inhabitable area of Thronas was greater than the total surface area of Hamardeen, according to the best Thronasian and Hamarian thinkers. And it had been inhabited far longer. Thronasian and Hamarian civilization could trace its history back to the fringes of crumbled ruins that marked the end of ancient empires beyond the ken of Man.

As the Golden Ship slowly penetrated the atmosphere, Garthanas and Price Adamas finally discerned the tremendous outlines of the greatest city in the universe— Muthark, home of the Emperor.

"There will be a stop here to unload almost everybody on board," the Prince told him. "Then you and I will continue onward to Aralanthas and Hedenas."

Below them they saw an endless panorama of tree-lined stone roads and stone buildings, interspersed with towering temples to various deities. As they drew closer to the center of the metropolis, after a half hour of drifting across the rooftops, the houses began to be replaced by luxurious villas and sprawling palaces whose roof-gardens gleamed with the color of rare plants and painted and pol-

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ished tiles inlaid with precious metals and jewels. Between the great palaces now could be seen mighty temples which seemed beyond the work of Man, so tremendous were they, and there were vast, open coliseums and private lakes and pavilions, luxury seeming to be heaped on luxury and might and power as they drew near to the great palace and the courts of the center of Muthark.

Behind giant walls, on the top of which were roads giving passage to troops, was the Inner City. It required a special city, in itself, to service the Palace, which was a square mile in extent and soared, in some parts, more than one hundred and fifty *talii* in height. There were gleaming domes and marble towers and vine covered arcades surrounding private pools and gardens, far above the level of the streets. Next to the great Palace was the mighty temple of Shivathis, Goddess of Creation, from whose uppermost tower the smoke of eternal fire rose in dubious greeting to the rival god of metal in the Golden Ship.

Somewhere down there, thought Garthanas, were Derkalas and Carthis. Before when he had been drunk and had been thinking of them he had not been quite sure what form of vengeance would satisfy him, but now that he was cold sober and so close to them he knew exactly what that vengeance would be—which made him wish he might get drunk again, because even his own thoughts appalled him.

While the ship unloaded at Muthark, Prince Adamas was suddenly summoned to appear before the Emperor, and Garthanas was forced to go into concealment again. While he waited for Adamas to return, he busied himself by applying a temporary disguise sufficient to get him into Hedenas without arousing too much suspicion on the part of the farm laborers there. He had been supplied with the harness and insignia of a Thronasian *moganus*, an officer commanding from three to five hundred men, and this he put on now. In addition, he bandaged his head, covering the slave brand, reviewing in his mind the little story he and Adamas had concocted to the effect that he had been wounded in a skirmish with some Hamarian slaves. Later, when things had settled down, they would see what Zircuth's medical friends could do in the way of a more permanent disguise. He had already begun to let his beard grow, and already he looked different, somehow older and distinguished.

Most of all he liked the fine quality sword that came with the outfit. It was of excellent metal, flexible, resilient, light, tough, and razor sharp. He practiced whipping it through the air and nipping little tassles off the curtain that hung across the door of the study. An enemy to false pride, Garthanas expected pride in a man who had

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reason for it. And of this he was justifiably proud — his amazing ability with a sword. Readily recognized as the best swordsman on Hamardeen, he secretly wondered if there were any master of the art on either of the two worlds who could teach him a trick or two. Xanthas had been one of the best blades he had met, but if there were none better than he—Garthanas shrugged, grinned, and made his sword sing through the air. One nickname he liked, because he thought he could live up to it. His people called him the Hamarian Sword. Now was the time to get into good condition.

Suddenly, his blade paused in mid-air, and he frowned darkly. He remembered a better sword than that of Xanthas. The man behind it had been—Derkalas—practically his equal.

Well? So much the better! He grimaced, showing his teeth, as he slashed a hole through the curtain.

"Here! Here! What's going on in there!" he heard Adamas exclaim.

His face was red with anger and embarrassment when the prince entered his room. "I like this sword," he said, lamely.

"But not the curtain, evidently."

Garthanas felt a slight pressure of the deck under him and knew the ship was under way again. "Did you see your father?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Yes, but incidentally your disguise is good. You'd better prepare yourself to return salutes."

"What did the Emperor want?"

"Well, naturally he wanted a preliminary report on my inspection of Hamardeen."

Garthanas arched his brows. "And?"

"He is having a private celebration of his own tonight because he is convinced, at last, that I may turn out to be what he wants."

"You must have put on quite an act."

"It was hardly necessary. I gave him one piece of news that solved everything. You see—he believes I really had you executed."

"Oh." Garthanas' eyes narrowed more than ever. "Was I—I mean, *am* I that important to him?"

"Perhaps—but what is more important is the fact he thinks I was capable of taking the law in my hands and acting like the Prince of Muthark should—according to him."

"I see . . . Anything else come up?"

"Yes—and then he clawed me over for authorizing such a large importation of Hamarian slaves this trip." Adamas' acquiline features clouded over. "For some reason I can't quite fathom yet, he has been following a policy of keeping Hamarians out of Thronas."

Garthanas' brow furrowed in puzzlement. "Well? I should think you'd be happy about that. We don't like slavery, do we?"

"True. But don't underestimate my father. His mind is not only

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keener than that sword of yours, it's completely unfathomable and unpredictable. I don't like the drift of things. It seems his plan is eventually to have every Hamarian isolated on Hamardeen."

Garthanas curved his sword into a circle and studied it. "Hmm. That *is* food for thought . . . Incidentally, did you mention you had brought along a certain Thronasian '*moganus*' who is going to instruct you in the arts of war?"

"No. He might have wanted to see you at once. I am saving you as a surprise later on." Adamas sought to change the subject. "How does it feel to be weighted down with the heavier grip of Thronas?"

"Great! A man likes to feel his feet are on the ground—or on the deck, as the case may be."

With a sly grin, Adamas drew his own sword. "How about giving me my first lesson in swordsmanship?" he asked.

In the same instant, his sword flew out of his hand and clattered into a corner. He felt the point of Garthanas' sword at his throat, and he paled.

"You've had it," replied the latter, grinning and staring him down with his narrowed eyes.

"Wh—what kind of a lesson is that?"

"A very important one. Never be caught by surprise—and *hang on* to your weapon next time."

The two men grinned at each other.

"By the gods—I'm glad I found you, Garthanas!" said the Prince.

Garthanas lowered his sword. "Is there any liquor around here, your Highness? Let's have a drink before we reach Hedenas—to us!"

ARALANTHAS was a country which all Thronasians regarded as a picturesque land of peace and warmth and color. It was peaceful because it was principally agrarian, yielding crops of grapes, sugar roots, and fibre bark for weaving. It was warm not only because of its location on the equator, but mostly because of submarine volcanic action off the coast which provided the region with the only warm ocean current on the planet. Moreover, among the towering, snow-capped mountains which formed a scenic background to this country were smouldering volcanoes, providing warm mineral baths for tourists and natives alike in the lowlands. It was colorful both because of the flowering trees and vines, and because of the dress and music and song and artistry of the people—if you visited them between those periods when the tax collectors came around, or when the imperial army was not recruiting Hamarian descendants for work on the canals of Hamardeen.

The lands belonging to the imperial villa of Hedenas practically constituted a province. It was a verdant valley spilling out of the lap of the foothills and spreading like a huge green fan to the sea,

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divided by a turbulent river that was fed by the eternal snows far above. Inasmuch as rains were more predictable in the uplands, lowland farming had come to be based on the principle of irrigation, so the river had its man-made tributaries which glided peacefully along the terraced lands, encircling vast vineyards, fibre reed plateaus and marshy sugar root fields. As the valley rose upward and narrowed between the shoulders of the hills, farming gave was to industry, where the wineries and the sugar plants and fibre processing mills were located. And beyond these lay the laborers' village, in the shadow of the great, terraced hill where the gleaming pillars of the "villa" and the dome of the Temple of Shivathis could be seen among the towering trees.

Garthanas had never been to Aralanthas, but he knew he was going to like it. His opinion of Hedenas was darkened only by the fact that it was all the product of Emperor Thamas I's industry in the days of his mysterious youth when he had not expected to be called to the Throne. Here was where the Emperor's dreams had been warped by personal bitterness and survived in a twisted form to dominate two worlds. Here was the grave of that unknown woman who had given birth to Adamas and Yevea. Here was the tomb of imperial mystery. And here lived a once scholarly and talented priest named Zircuth who chose to drown his unspoken memories in his cup.

They disembarked from the Golden Ship along with fifty guards reassigned from Muthark, plus twenty-five Hamarian slaves from Hamardeen. When the unloading was finished, the ship automatically took to the sky and returned to Muthark, where it usually hovered, waiting for new commands from the Emperor or those with delegated authority.

When they entered the inner grounds of the villa, the two of them walked alone up the graveled path between the trees. Guards, slaves and *qulnii* had taken another route toward the service entrances to the palatial establishment, bearing the imperial luggage. Garthanas was looking at the pale, daylight sky, comparing it to the brighter skies of Hamardeen, and he shivered, knowing that it might take many days for his blood chemistry to change sufficiently to make an adjustment to this climate, which was the warmest that Thronas could provide. But instinctively there was a satisfaction in knowing he was back on the planet of his birth. Though he despised most of its aspects, there was still a sense of identity to be derived from it.

Adamas was looking anxiously ahead of him toward the villa, and suddenly a little gasp of relief escaped his lips when he saw Yevea come running toward them.

"Yevea!" he exclaimed, and ran

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ahead to meet her.

Garthanas slowed his steps, watching, assailed inwardly by a curious conflict between morals and understanding. He recognized Yevea at once because of the statue he had seen in the villa garden on Hamardeen. Here was that same frail, virginal looking creature with the long, blond hair and the soulful blue eyes, falling into her brother's arms with the telltale abandon of a lover. He wondered if there were not sadists among the gods—or if in the case of the leaders of men, especially, they tortured them with the taste of forbidden manna. In terms of love, alone, he could sympathize with these two when he witnessed their hungered response, one to the other — because he knew such hunger. Goddess or witch, there was always Carthis.

"Tharnas," said Adamas, turning to him, happily—they had agreed that his name should be changed for the time being — "this is Yevea."

He had avoided saying this was his sister. Well, at least they certainly did not look like brother and sister.

"I know," he answered with a grim smile. "Have you forgotten the statue?"

Adamas reddened. Through memory of it they both saw Yevea as he had portrayed her—as naked as Shivathis.

The girl searched his narrowed eyes, wonderingly. Then she studied his stern, rugged face and took in the size and strength of his towering frame—and his military insignia. She smiled, uncertainly.

"Yevea, this is Tharnas, an authority on Hamarian affairs on Hamardeen. He will be with us a while to instruct me."

She held out her girlish little hand, and Garthanas kissed it gravely.

"You've been wounded," she said, observing the bandage on his head.

"Nothing serious," he returned, straightening up.

"Ah-tell me," put in Adamas, hastening to change the subject. "Where is Zircuth?" The three of them resumed their way up the path toward the villa.

Yevea hesitated.

"Don't tell me he's back in one of his drinking spells!"

"No—something which frightens me more." Garthanas saw a shadow of concern cross her lovely, delicate features. "He has gone back—to the hills."

Adamas stopped. "Oh no! — not that!"

"I'm afraid so. He's been gone for days."

Adamas turned to Garthanas. "About every few years or so, Zircuth fails to get satisfaction even from his wine — so he turns to Jehnthavas—"

There was a cold feeling at the back of Garthanas' neck which had nothing to do with Thronasian weather. "You mean—the invisi-

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ble, forbidden god of beggars?"

Adamas nodded. "It seems only when he is so troubled that nothing else can help him he goes up there into the hills, because he believes Jehnthavas lives alone in the sky."

"But I thought — Zircuth was your family priest of Shivathis?"

"He is—but a renegade, in a way. My father broke him from high priestly office once because of this Jehnthavas business. For some reason he keeps Zircuth here a virtual prisoner—like Yevea."

"Adamas! Please!" Yevea blushed.

"My friend Tharnas understands many things, Yevea. Wait until you come to know him better."

Yevea reverted hastily to the previous subject. "Don't you think you should go after Zircuth?"

"Yes, of course. It will be a good opportunity to show Tharnas the country, too. We can ride up on *kethalii* and perhaps do some hunting on the way. How does that sound to you, Tharnas?"

"Hmm?" Garthanas looked startled. "Oh—yes. That's fine. Fine."

He had been thinking of the mendicant priest on Hamardeen who had told him there was one god who was not of stone, but of all things and all truth. The one who had said, "Find you the true mother of your blood and Hamar shall be free."

And then on the other hand, he had actually talked to another sort of god—the one who lived in the Golden Ship. And come to think of it, that god really did live in the sky, even among the stars, if he chose.

Garthanas grunted semi-audibly, in his impatience with things that were not the concern of warriors. He would leave all that to the philosophers and the blind.

KETHALII were multiple purpose beasts. They served the purpose of both mount and hunting dog. Giant cousins to the dogs, they were white and long-haired, accustomed to living in the dreary wastelands of the ice-continents and foraging for themselves. Formerly their howling packs had been the scourge of human explorers before the *qulnii* had proved they could be tamed. Almost as tall at the shoulder as a man, they were the most nimble and sure-footed beasts obtainable for the dangerous passages in the mountains. It was Garthanas' first ride on a *kethalus* and he considered it much more relaxing than storming along on the scaly back of a Hamardeenan *kruthus*.

Which fact enabled him to enjoy the scenery. After the comparatively flat horizons of Hamardeen, this was a wonderland of breathtaking panoramas. The mountains ahead were so vast that one could only sense their size rather than see it, and the eternally frozen peaks appeared to have more in common with the dark sea

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of the stars — which glimmered here in the midst of day at these altitudes—than with the distance-misted coastlands far below.

As his *kethalus* sniffed eagerly at the trail and surged ahead, Adamas remarked, "I think we're getting close now. They always smell the huts of the Upland Dwellers because of the *mergralii* they keep for live stock."

"Is Zircuth staying at one of those huts?"

"Yes. He has an old friend up here who takes care of him when he's—this way."

The hut was made of sod, behind which was a small corral enclosing a half dozen, furry little creatures known as *mergralli.* The howls and bellowing yelps of the *kethalii,* straining at their reins, brought the owner of the hut outside, grinning at them toothlessly. He kneeled instantly and touched the ground with his forehead when he recognized his visitor—and his deference was motivated also by the insignia which Garthanas was wearing.

Adamas asked him about Zircuth and he shook his head sadly, finally getting to his bare, dirt-caked feet. He pointed off into the hills, and Adamas goaded his mount into a light gallop. Garthanas followed immediately.

They found Zircuth on his knees in front of a cave that had once been the lair of a screaming glide-cat, a ferocious, web-pelted monster of the mountain skies which had since been hunted out of these regions. Before him was a precipice that dropped away into mist shrouded depths, and above him was the shoulder of the gleaming white cordillera — and the dark gray of the sky with its glimmering stars. He started, a resentful expression on his aged face at the intrusion, but when he recognized Adamas the resentment was replaced with sudden joy and he struggled to his feet. He wore the black robe of the order of Shiva-this, and his head was shaved in accordance with the regulations of the temple, but this was compensated for by a full, black beard that was streaked with gray.

"Adamas!" he exclaimed, happily. "At last you have returned from Hamardeen! I did not know—"

"How could you?" interrupted Adamas, without dismounting. "You were up here."

The *kethalii* were sniffing and whimpering, for all their size and ferociousness, vaguely aware that a glide-cat had once lived here. They pranced about nervously.

Zircuth clutched at something that hung on a chain from his neck. "Forgive my despondence," he said. "But your arrival has lifted this cloud. I will go back to Hedenas now." He looked curiously at Garthanas, studying his face and his eyes more than his harness and insignia.

"I would introduce you to this man," said Adamas, "if it were not

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necessary for me to tell you something very important first." He motioned with his head to Garthanas. "Let's dismount. This is a good place to talk. Zircuth is one who may be trusted with our secret."

The old priest looked from one to the other, at first slightly bewildered, then suddenly aware that the three of them were to be involved in a very vital matter. In his old eyes Garthanas saw things that he liked, and in his face, too. There was a reservoir of strength and wisdom which could still be tapped if occasion demanded, and this was such an occasion.

Adamas reviewed swiftly the political philosophies which Zircuth had taught him. He told the priest most of his plan for deceiving his father, the Emperor, and of how he would take over and abolish slavery, establishing a bi-partisan representative form of government as soon as he obtained the key to the power of the Golden Ship, but he saved the biggest surprise until last.

"This is wonderful news," replied Zircuth, still studying Garthanas curiously, "but it seems that something is lacking in the entire picture."

"*What do you mean?*"

Zircuth placed a gentle hand on Adamas' arm. "My son, do not take offense at what I am going to tell you, but in such matters as these we must face reality. You are a good man, but do the people know it? Will they follow you?"

"I know what you want to say. I haven't the name, the background, the looks and the leadership to take this great step and establish a balance between Thronasians and Hamarians. The Hamarians themselves might harbor the thought of revolt in their minds if we brought a lot of them back here, as long as a Thronasian sat on the throne, and the Thronasians would suspect this and thus distrust the whole procedure."

"Exactly."

"Well, on Hamardeen I met the type of leader you have in mind," said Adamas, looking a little sad and troubled. "But unfortunately we had to execute him."

Zircuth's brow furrowed. "Then why mention it? I don't understand."

"The man was called Garthanas."

Zircuth had seated himself on the ground, but now he staggered to his feet, his face suddenly pale. "The Hamarian Sword!" he exclaimed. "Don't tell me he is dead! There was the *only* man who could have made your plan perfectly feasible! He was the last of the truly great leaders of men—a man who was brave and defiant and who could inspire a great mass of people by his deeds. How could you let such a man as that be executed!"

Adamas smiled, triumphantly. "Both the Thronasians and the Hamarians witnessed the execu-

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tion," he said. "But they only *think* he is dead. I am saving him for a 'resurrection' at the proper moment. Zircuth—*this* man is Garthanas!"

The priest's mouth dropped agape. He released the object he had been clutching all this time in his hand and made a curious sign, touching an index finger to his forehead and looking upward at the sky—a forbidden piece of ritual dedicated to Jehnthavas. On his chest, the object hung on its chain—the naked figure of Shivathis, Goddess of Creation.

And Garthanas, his eyes no longer narrowed, stared dumbfounded at it. His mouth opened and he exclaimed, "Mugu!"

"What?" said Adamas.

"I—I'm sorry. It's been years since I've seen one of those."

"It's Shivathis," replied Adamas, disappointed that his surprise had been dulled by this curious reaction.

"I know. Once, when I was a child, I called her "'Mugu.'" He looked up, suddenly smiling at Zircuth. He extended his hand to the priest, who took it in both of his, with tears in his eyes.

"This is a god-sent miracle!" exclaimed the latter. "I am glad I have lived to meet you, Garthanas. I knew you were a leader of men before I knew who you were." He turned to Adamas and clapped him enthusiastically on the back. "My son, you have my blessings—whatever they may be worth from a broken down priest like myself—because the signs are heavy with good portent."

"I should never have dared to turn these wheels of empire without your blessing," Adamas replied. "You have been the teacher of my life."

During the return trip, Garthanas was unusually silent, thinking of the "Mugu" worn by Zircuth. It had been such a trinket that he remembered reaching for as an infant, worn about the neck of another priest of Shivathis. When and where he could not tell. It was the earliest recollection of his life.

FROM that day onward, the various facets of the Great Plan were developed rapidly. One dark night, Adamas and Zircuth took Garthanas to the home of an old physician and friend of the priest's, who was told that this "Tharnas" with the slave brand on his forehead had been of noble birth but he and his parents had been sent into slavery on Hamardeen years before during the reign of Romuth the Moron, and that now he was being reinstated as a nobleman. The physician applied his "magic substance" that looked like skin, effectively covering the scar. Garthanas was to return every few months to have it renewed until his skin had become sufficiently accustomed to the substance to take a permanent covering. In the meantime, there

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would be irritations and itching, he was told, but he must not scratch it. The relief obtained from not having to wear a bandage was worth it to Garthanas.

The pretended training of Adamas in the arts of war commenced. In the mornings there was strategic practice arranged with the officer of the local Thronasian guards, and in the afternoon there was fencing. Although Garthanas attempted to conceal his real prowess with a sword, the officer of the guards and other men began to wonder about the origin of this mysterious *moganus* who stood so high in the favor of the Prince.

One morning Garthanas took a walk alone down through the laborer's village below the villa and along the roads between the sugar plants and wineries, down across the bridges spanning the irrigation canals and among the wet fields where the sugar root grew. He had wanted merely to take in the scenery here which was somewhat reminiscent of his childhood, but his mood was disrupted by the sight of at least fifty Hamarian slaves who were engaged in a strange ceremony just prior to commencing the day's harvesting. The slave-master, a half-breed "trustee" slave, was the only man among them who was armed with a sword, and it was he alone who stood while the others kneeled in mournful song, pounding their breasts as though they were professional mourners. The half-breed scowled at them dubiously but permitted them to continue. He was evidently waiting for the blast from the horn of the morning guard watch, signalling that it would be time to get to work.

Garthanas suddenly stopped, amazed, because he recognized a forbidden song:

"The Empire and the ramparts fell
Where Muthark's ancient temples knell
The death-song of old glory . . ."

He stepped close to the slave-master and nodded his head toward the mourners, questioningly.

The half-breed looked him over sullenly, one hand on the hilt of his sword. Actually, he should have saluted him with respect. Finally he said, "They've received news from Hamardeen. Garthanas has been executed."

Garthanas could only stand there and watch them, unable to tell them the truth, that the one leader on whom they had pinned their faith stood even now among them—and in a most favorable position to do them some good. Instead, he sought to change the subject.

"Are you forgetting regulations?" he asked, trying to sound offended.

The slave-master sneered and gave a salute. "Is that what you want?" he almost snarled.

"No, I want more. You will stop them from singing that song. You

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know it is forbidden." However bitter the taste in his mouth, he had to play his part.

"I'm not under your command," retorted the other, and he grinned. "But I'll do as you say. Hey—you!"

The Hamarians stopped singing. They looked up at Garthanas in sullen defiance.

"The *moganus* here says you'll have to stop that!"

The crowd grumbled, and they got slowly to their feet. They looked Garthanas in the eye and sang:

"The gods look down and are alone
Where Hamar someday shall atone . . ."

They had changed the words! The despondent song was taking on a defiant tone. Garthanas wanted to grin, but he held his face in an expression of offended dignity. He raised his sword partly out of its sheath, then snapped it back in place and strode off, listening to the defiant parody that followed him.

"Their dreams of old we shall revive
They are of stone but we're alive,
And vengeance is our trust."

Well, he thought, Yesterday might be dust, but Tomorrow looked like a big heap of black powder. The old feeling of defiance and victory was in his blood. This time the Hamarians had built up *his* morale! They were ripe for a revolution. Perhaps the camouflage of imperialism around here was serving a double purpose.

The most discouraging news, of late, however, was that the Golden Ship had been making many trips, taking thousands of Hamarians away from Thronas—into exile on Hamardeen. Garthanas wished he might have a look at Thamas I and attempt to guess what was going on inside his imperial skull.

On the way back to the villa, he met Zircuth. The bearded old priest invited him to take a little walk with him. They went up to the highest irrigation canal against the side of the hills, where they could look back at the whole expanse of Hedenas.

"I have deliberately sought you," Zircuth told him. "I wanted to warn you of trouble that is in the air."

"I've had a sample of it," Garthanas replied, and he nodded his head in the direction of the Hamarians, who had now gone to work in the fields. "It's ironical that they should hate me when I'm also the object of their mourning."

"That's not what I'm getting at." The priest's eyes were shadowed with concern.

"Then what is it?"

"It concerns you more directly. You see, ever since Adamas has begun to find new favor with the Emperor—your own position has been eyed with greater envy."

"By whom?"

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"Well, at first it was the local guards and their officers—but then they began to take stories of your prowess with the sword back to Muthark, and now it seems you have attracted the attention of various power-hungry overlords of the Military. I have learned that in Muthark such questions are being asked as: Who is this Tharnas, the unassigned *moganus* of Hedenas? Where are his records in the archives of the Thronasian Army? Under which *mogrus* has he served before?"

"Sooner or later I expected that."

"But this thing has developed to the point of action. Among those military officials who are high enough to be involved in upper echelon politics there is a certain clever *moganus* by the name of Sorthalas. It seems the authorities have enlisted his aid in getting more personal evidence before taking the matter to the Emperor. I know this Sorthalas well, and if he starts investigating—"

"What do you know about him?"

"Well, they couldn't have picked a man who is in a better position to find out about you. He is intimately involved in the personal affairs of the Emperor *and* Adamas, because he appears to be related in some way to Gialnis, the mother of Merlanthis, who is to marry Adamas. He is also the manager of the widow Gialnis' estate, which was returned to her after Thamas I took the Throne."

"Gialnis," Garthanas mused. "Isn't she the woman who—"

Zircuth's face darkened. Then it seemed that by an effort of will he gained control of his emotions. "I see Adamas had told you something of the personal history of Thamas and Gialnis," he said. "Yes, she was his first and perhaps only *real* love." He emphasized this bitterly, as though there were other loves not so real—as though he, himself, had some connection with the Emperor's secret past. "But when it was announced that Romuth would take the throne, Gialnis' parents withdrew their offer, and the two lovers were separated. This, perhaps, was the beginning of Thamas' bitterness with life. That he was injured in a duel after the birth of Yevea, becoming sterile and unable to produce another heir besides Adamas —was another added factor to twist his personality."

"Then this Merlanthis," said Garthanas, "is the daughter of Gialnis by a later marriage?"

"Yes. Gialnis finally married Thamas' old rival for her affections —a man who died some years ago. In these later years Thamas and Gialnis have become intimates again, and it seems they both favor a marriage between Merlanthis and Adamas as a sort of vicarious realization of their earlier dreams. The idea did not occur to them until Merlanthis returned to her mother. The girl ran away from home when the estate was lost, un-

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der Romuth's reign—but when she learned of her mother's new status she returned. Her interest in Adamas is purely strategic. She is a scheming rascal, for all her beauty. She aims at being Empress."

"I see. But getting back to this *moganus* you mentioned. What was his name?"

"Sorthalas. He may be bold enough to contact you directly before long, and I'm wondering what sort of logical defense you can make."

"I've been preparing for that. You see, my parents were actually Thronasians of minor nobility. They took me to Hamardeen when I was young, and they were killed during early Hamarian uprisings. No one need know that I turned out to be Garthanas. I can be exactly what you told your doctor friend—a reinstated nobleman. They can look up my parents' records for themselves."

"Hmm. That may be just the plan we'll have to follow. We must talk this over with Adamas."

They began to walk back toward the villa, and soon they were near the Temple of Shivathis.

"Have you performed any of the rituals to the Goddess since your return?" asked the priest. "I have not seen you enter the Temple." They stood before the gates of the domed building. Garthanas squinted upward at the smoke of eternal fire rising from its top.

"No," he said. "It seems you and I are both confused about our gods."

Zircuth darkened visibly and looked at the ground. Suddenly, he looked up, decisively. "Come in here," he said, opening the gate.

They went into the temple. And Garthanas stopped, suddenly, looking up at the naked image of Shivathis. He had seen other likenesses of the goddess, but this was the most beautiful of all, and the strangest. Usually the statues of her he had seen were done in one of the harder black rocks suitable for fine sculptoring, but this was done with a lighter material and painted to resemble a living being. In the dim light of the torches below her, Shivathis looked very much alive. After he had looked into her apparently searching and challenging eyes and at those full lips that curved in the most subtle suggestion of a seductive smile, he was forced to study her body, which was beautiful enough in all its feminine attractions to tempt the soul of a man. Moreover, there was something very familiar about her features which seemed to remind him of someone he had seen before. For all her pagan sort of beauty, there was a tenderness hidden away beneath her, an awareness of the aesthetic, an expression of longing for the indefinable.

"Well? What do you think of her?" asked Zircuth.

"She's—haunting."

"How true." In Zircuth's eyes Garthanas saw both longing and sorrow.

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"Who made her? Is this your work?"

Zircuth sighed. "Yes. I made her —long ago."

"It is a masterpiece. Too bad it was so long ago. I should like to have known the model."

Zircuth started, glaring at him suspiciously. "She's dead!" he exclaimed, hastily.

Garthanas knew he was treading on secret ground, that he was very close to a clue to the imperial mysteries that lay buried here at Hedenas. Surprised at his own boldness, he said, "In other words, the model was Adamas' unknown mother."

Zircuth grasped his arm, fiercely. "That is something Adamas, himself, does not suspect. My lips are sealed concerning this, and the penalty for revealing it is death. You will remember that!"

Garthanas studied the priest curiously. "You mean — the Emperor wants it kept secret? Why?"

Suddenly, there were tears in Zircuth's eyes. "You may wonder why I have been known to be a drunkard. It is because I am a coward!"

"I don't see the coward in you. There's something else behind all this — not merely the threat of death."

Through incipient tears, Zircuth glared at him. "You are too perceiving," he said. "Now let's drop the whole subject."

Garthanas looked up at Shivathis again, realizing now that she has reminded him of Adamas. She was dark, a typical Thronasian type.

"All right," he answered. "But there is another phase of this mystery which maybe you could tell me something about."

"I don't know. What is it?"

"Who—or what—is Jehnthavas, really?"

Again, Zircuth started, almost fearfully. Then a strange, wondering elation came over him as he looked up at Garthanas. "Why—why do you ask that?" he said.

"I seek truth. Regardless of where it exists—"

Hastily, Zircuth led Garthanas from the temple. They went up into the gardens of the villa and conversed in low tones for several hours.

"So you see," Zircuth concluded, finally, "this is the only faith which does not separate Man from God. This is a real and workable theosophy which states that the essential divinity is in Man, himself, that he is a part of that certain unity of consciousness and law which underlies all phenomena in the universe. A belief in this ultimate unity, Jehnthavas, is a belief in self—and there you have the source of self-respect and the beginnings of godliness."

Zircuth laid a hand on Garthanas' powerful arm. "You are important to the future history of Mankind," he said. "You stand at the threshold of that history. If you could but embrace this doc-

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trine, forbidden though it may be in the eyes of the materialistic and power-greedy priesthood, it would give you the strength you need to see you through all difficulties."

"Certainly the masses here on Thronas could use some of this self-respect and godliness," remarked Garthanas. "I haven't visited Muthark yet, but from what I've heard—"

Zircuth almost snarled in his rage. "That constant debauchery and degredation of the flesh is an anarchy of the soul!" he exclaimed. "If Jehnthavas is an actual entity with a will of His own, He may destroy this world before long—unless we can change it."

"But what about the metal god in the Golden Ship?"

"I suspect that the original makers of the ship were clever enough to construct some sort of machine equipped with wonders beyond our comprehension, which acts in a fashion to continue some of their purpose. It is an example of God in Man, who created a lesser god to serve him."

Garthanas remembered that the metal god had said only that it was a protector and servant of the leader of men. He looked at Zircuth, definitely convinced that here was one of the fathers of Wisdom.

And he thought—if Man had made that weird thing in the Golden Ship, *Man could control it!*

IN THAT moment, Garthanas narrowed his eyes, apprehensively, as he observed a lone rider approaching the villa at a gallop, astride a magnificent, bronze colored *kethalus*. In the morning sunlight he could make out the military trappings of a *moganus* and several other insignia denoting special office.

"Who is that?" he asked Zircuth, pointing.

"By the gods!" exclaimed the latter, tensing. "It is that same Sorlathas of whom I told you! Now the trouble begins!"

The officer was still too distant for Garthanas to make out his features, but there was something about the way he held himself and the way he held the saddle that brought back vague, indefinable memories. Something started his pulse to pounding as the racing figure disappeared under a grove of trees below.

Both men heard the sound of running feet. They looked up to see Adamas. He was pointing to the sky.

"The Golden Ship!" he exclaimed. "I have been informed that my father is visiting us!"

"The Emperor!" murmured Zircuth, clutching at his Shivathis which still dangled from his neck.

"Well, maybe that's what Sorthalas is hurrying about," said Garthanas. "He has been the ship, too."

"Sorthalas!" exclaimed Adamas, paling slightly. "Have you seen him?"

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"He'll be at the villa any minute now," put in Zircuth.

"Then brace yourself, Garthanas," said Adamas. "Anything can happen."

The three men glanced up at the approaching ship in the sky. Then they all hurried toward the villa, to be met by a worried looking Yevea. She now knew their secret, and she knew what might be behind Sorthalas' visit. If he expressed his suspicions in front of the Emperor—

But evidently there was something else that bothered her, too. "Adamas," she said. "Your father has come — for the wedding!" Tears of consternation welled up in her eyes.

This stopped everybody. Adamas glanced swiftly at Garthanas and Zircuth. The latter clutched his Shivathis harder than ever and he looked away from Adamas only to meet the narrowed eyes of Garthanas. The old priest's lips quivered, and he left them in haste.

Garthanas slowly turned his head from looking at Zircuth's departing figure. He stared at Adamas and Yevea. "Is it true?" he asked.

Adamas placed his arm around Yevea's shoulders and hugged her to him. "My father has been pressing the issue," he answered. "He might well be coming here to demand a marriage ceremony between me and Merlanthis."

Yevea sobbed and buried her head against Adamas. "Oh why must it be this way!" she cried.

Garthanas struggled to bring together many disconnected clues and suspicions in his mind in connection with the mysteries of Hedenas—the strange attitude of Zircuth in regard to Adamas and Yevea, the secret of the lifesize Shivathis in the Temple — He shook his head, angrily.

"I'll meet you inside the villa," he said, and strode on, leaving the two lovers alone with their fears and their grief.

Garthanas went to his rooms to change into formal military attire. He had a presentiment that this day was going to be either long remembered—or not remembered at all. Because if things went wrong, it could mean death. And much depended on this fellow, Sorthalas.

The thought of Sorthalas caused Garthanas to pick up his sword and flex it. He paused, staring at the gleaming blade. What instinct had moved him to do that?

He shot it home in its scabbard and stomped out of his rooms through the glittering halls of the imperial villa, toward the luxurious reception chambers. He could hear the guards trumpeting a salute to the Emperor. Servants and slaves ran frantically about under the sharp commands of slave-masters and guards, making everything in readiness for the surprise visit.

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THE main reception hall was twenty-five *talii* in length, equipped with a raised dais at one end which supported several great chairs behind a broad, ornate table. One side of the hall was open, giving access through vine-grown arches to a broad veranda, from which a beautiful view of the broadening green fields of Hedenas and the ocean beyond it could be had.

The villa guards stood on either side of the hall in their military best, with swords trembling before their noses in stiff salute. Slaves scurried to place bowls of fruit and jugs of rare wine on the table before the great chairs on the dais. Bespangled noblemen of the court at Muthark stomped imperiously into the chamber, clearing the way for the Emperor. Prince Adamas, decked out in regal splendor, stood expressionlessly before the table on the dais, waiting for his father. His eyes glanced once into Garthanas' eyes, warningly, then looked away.

Garthanas took a place at one end of the line of guards opposite the arches and looked about for Yevea and Zircuth, who were conspicuous by their absence. And so, for that matter, was the man who might have answered the description of Sorthalas. Perhaps, he reasoned, it was etiquette for the officer to wait until the Emperor had passed him at the villa's entrance before coming in.

Suddenly, the guards and the noblemen dropped to one knee as the Emperor appeared. Only Adamas stood up, but he cast another warning glance at Garthanas.

Well, no use making a scene, Garthanas reasoned, dropping to one knee. Pride could not take precedence over their carefully conceived Plan. He kneeled there with the rest, his eyes narrowed to hateful slits as he watched the Emperor, Thamas I, approach the dais.

He saw a man who appeared to be in his fifties, but it was difficult to judge because of his lean figure and energetic stride. Underneath all those gold, jewel incrusted trappings, Garthanas was surprised to discern the healthy frame of a warrior—one who was not as muscular as he was quick and wiry. In his youth he had not been a small man, like Adamas. Rather, he still showed the lines of a large man who probably handled a *kethalus* and a sword as well as any man of his age on the planet.

But in his face there was much more to be seen as he swiftly passed Garthanas, flicking out his sword to return the salute his son was giving him. Dark-visaged, gaunt, with a stubborn set to his angular chin—which was covered by a short beard—he seemed to depend solely on his eyes for expression. They were dark, deep-set under outward jutting brows, and they were alive, burning with a mental energy that put even Garthanas instantly on his guard.

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Though he hated the maliciousness of the man's character, he admired its strength.

Here was the man who had finished most of the work of exiling the Hamarians, the man who sent his Golden Ship to lay waste the villages of those who were guilty of fighting for freedom and dignity. Here was the master figure of the hated Muthark Dynasty who ruled the mightiest and the foulest empire in the history of Man. Garthanas wanted to spit at his heels but restrained himself.

Without ceremony, Thamas I mounted the dais and turned to face the people assembled in the hall. He still held his sword in his hand, and with it he signalled everybody to rise.

There was a clattering of swords returning to scabbards.

Thamas I indicated his son with his sword. "Hail the Prince of Muthark!" he commanded, in concise, energetic tones. His piercing glance darted about among the assembled noblemen.

Swords clattered out of their scabbards once more and a roaring shout was heard. *"Hail the Prince of Muthark!"* they cried, while Garthanas joined them.

He was looking at the heavy, jeweled medallion on the Emperor's chest. It was identical to the one Adamas was wearing, except for the center stone, which was luminescent. It was a fascinating and beautiful thing the like of which Garthanas had never been before.

"My son has done well," said the Emperor, briskly. "It is time for me to make arrangements for the next great step in his approach to the imperial Throne."

Another great shout went up, but Adamas did not smile. He only inclined slightly from the waist to acknowledge the acclaim.

The Emperor went around the table and sat down in one of the great chairs. He signalled Adamas to do the same, while he replaced his sword in its jeweled scabbard and picked up a great bunch of purple fruit to munch on. Garthanas could have sworn there was a malicious glimmer in his eye as he watched his son. He knew that a marriage with Merlanthis was intimated, and he knew what this meant to Adamas in relation to his helpless love for Yevea. Adamas came and sat down beside his father, trying to keep his eyes away from Garthanas.

A gold-harnessed honor guard which had accompanied the Emperor on the ship now took its place behind the two on the dais.

"Now that I am here," continued the Emperor, "I should like to see this *moganus,* known as Tharnas, who is to be my son's teacher in Hamarian affairs and the arts of war."

Garthanas tensed in the struggle to control his emotions. It required a positive effort of will to keep his hand from the hilt of his sword. He saw Adamas lean toward the Em-

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peror and nod to him. He stepped forward to the foot of the dais and forced himself to drop to one knee, bowing his head. But he got to his feet before receiving permission to do so, which elicited a gasp of astonishment from the people on the floor.

Now Garthanas had the full attention of Thamas I, and the two men glared at each other, deliberately measuring and weighing the character of each. Garthanas found himself face to face with the strongest personality he had ever met.

"You look at me," said the Emperor, "but with narrowed eyes."

"A habit, your Imperial Highness," responded Garthanas, in his deep, booming voice. "It is owing to years spent on the deserts of Hamardeen under a brighter sun."

The Emperor studiously peeled one of the purple fruits and popped it into his mouth as he looked Garthanas over. "You are a man to satisfy the eyes of a warrior," he commented, smoothly. "Tell me something of your history." There was a tone in his voice that told both Garthanas and Adamas that the Emperor suspected more than he let on. Perhaps some of the gossip in military circles had already reached his ears!

"Come now," chided Thamas I, "surely among accomplished warriors modesty is a false virtue." Evidently he was enjoying himself immensely, if Garthanas correctly interpreted the wicked twinkle in his eye. Adamas was growing paler by the second.

"There is not too much to tell, your Highness," Garthanas finally blurted out, to keep Adamas from saying anything that would not agree with his story. "My parents were of the minor Thronasian nobility who were sent to Hamardeen under the reign of Romuth. There they were killed during the early Hamarian uprisings—"

"What were the names of your parents," interrupted Thamas I sharply. "And what was your father's office?"

Garthanas heard a few snickers from the noblemen who had come along from Muthark. When his narrowed eyes searched out the authors of those sounds, the sounds ceased.

"I was a boy of fourteen when they were killed," he answered, finally. "My father's name was—Kanthas of—"

Thamas I leaned forward, challengingly. "Yes? Kanthas of *what!*"

"It's difficult to remember, your Highness. It's some Thronasian town—Thoronis! That's it! Kanthas of Thoronis. And my mother's name was Sarlis. I don't know my father's office. It had something to do with colonial government on Hamardeen—but I submit my father's name, whose record may be searched."

The Emperor frowned in slight puzzlement, glancing quickly at a few of the noblemen who had been snickering. Adamas was trying to

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relax, his acquiline face glistening with a light film of perspiration.

"All right," said Thamas I, "we have your father's name and your statement that he was of the minor nobility. After your parents' death, what happened to you?"

Garthanas shrugged, with perfect nonchalance. "I was an orphan. In the following years of confusion and uprisings I wandered wherever circumstances and the supply of food guided me. I lived and traveled with Hamarians and I also lived and traveled with Thronasians. In my later years I studied with the imperial Thronasian guards and took up the art of the sword as a sort of vocation. The garrison at Tharlanthis used to pay me in food and lodging, and in other ways, for fighting Hamarians with them. After a while, I became a minor officer in their ranks, but when his Highness, the Prince, discovered me and became impressed enough by my swordsmanship to investigate my background, he took me in as his teacher."

Garthanas looked straight into Adamas' eyes and knew the other was thinking the same thing as he was. That he had just told a bald lie, but before it could be disproven Adamas would be Emperor.

"I see," said Thamas I. "Now tell me—in the course of your association with the Hamarians on Hamardeen, did you ever learn their secret concerning this explosive powder they have invented?"

"No," Garthanas replied, truthfully. "I am only a warrior, not a chemist, your Highness."

"You realize, of course, that this weapon is a serious thing. It makes the Hamarians dangerous."

"But—your Highness, with the Golden Ship you can isolate them with the moat of the star-sea, which no one could ever cross."

Thamas I's eyes glimmered. He evidently liked an intellectual duel in which the opponents emotions could be used as a trap. "I know," he replied, "but I dislike having to worry about such a very clever people. If they have invented this marvelous explosive substance, who knows what they may invent in another generation or so? I am thinking of the future peace and safety of Thronas. And therefore, I was thinking that if the Golden Ship were to *destroy* Hamardeen utterly—"

A torrent of exclamations issued from the assembled people on the floor, and Adamas stared at his father in obvious horror. But the Emperor was analyzing every muscle in Garthanas' face, none of which moved, to his evident disappointment.

"As I was saying," continued Thamas I, deliberately probing Garthanas with his eyes, "if I were to order the Golden Ship to destroy Hamardeen entirely, it would not only rid us Thronasians of a headache and a concern for the future peace and safety of Thronas, but it would constitute the mighti-

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est sacrifice ever made by Man to our sacred goddess, Shivathis."

The assemblage quickly mumbled the ritual statement: *"Sacred be the name of Shivathis forever!"*

And Garthanas' eyes narrowed down to slits again as he returned the Emperor's stare. So he was covering up with religion—dressing up calloused, inhuman fiendishness with a high-sounding motivation.

"You see," continued Thamas I, pleasantly, as though he were discussing what he preferred to have for breakfast, "it has come to my attention that the Hamarians of Hamardeen are turning away from Shivathis — that they even pay homage to the forbidden god, Jehnthavas." While a flurry of whispered comment again went around the room, Thamas I still concentrated on Garthanas. "Tharnas, you do not seem to respond to this idea. You hesitate. Why? Don't tell me you have become contaminated by associating with those heathens!"

"No, your Highness," returned Garthanas, trying to think of something brutal to say. "I—was merely thinking that it would be a shame to lose the canals. They are a monument, you might say, to your imperial fame." His thoughts were racing, and when he glanced from time to time at Adamas he knew the latter was thinking fast also. Their Plan had to be brought to a head quickly before this madman actually sent the Golden Ship on such a mission. Of course it was madness in the first place to assume that even the Golden Ship could actually destroy a whole planet, but certainly it could wipe out a race of men, such as the Hamarians.

At that moment, a guard stepped close to the Emperor and whispered to him. The latter looked up, smiling pleasantly, and when he spoke a note of personal interest was in his voice. He was looking at the entrance of the hall.

"Ah yes! The noble Sorthalas! I have been waiting to see you!"

Garthanas' hand went to his sword hilt instantly and involuntarily. For some strange reason, however, he could not bring himself to crane his neck to look at Sorthalas. His eyes, instead, were fixed on the Emperor's face.

"Sorthalas," said the latter, as the officer came to the foot of the dais, "it is time you made the acquaintance of Tharnas of Hamardeen."

Simultaneously, Sorthalas and Garthanas turned to salute each other. They found each other's eyes, and slowly they straightened up from their slight bows and stared at each other. Sorthalas, like Garthanas, has grown a beard and looked older and more distinguished, but brown, gold-flecked eyes and a well-known scar cut across his left brow could not be hidden or forgotten. When Sorthalas' eyes suddenly searched Garthanas' forehead for the hidden slave brand, he

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revealed the fact that he had guessed the truth, and Garthanas could no longer suppress his emotions.

"Derkalas!" he roared.

Adamas sprang to his feet, mouth agape, staring from one to the other. The Emperor tensed with surprise, but remained silent, seriously concerned with this totally unexpected development. Garthanas' bellow of rage and the well known name he had uttered produced a dead silence in the great hall.

Derkalas' hand sprang to the hilt of his sword, but as quickly he fought for control of himself. He raised his brows haughtily. "Is the man mad?" he asked.

"No!" cried Garthanas to the Emperor. "If you are worried about enemies of the Empire, your Highness, here is the greatest of all! Disguised in your midst! Posing as a relative of the lady Gialnis —which is some nefarious scheme of his own!"

The personal aspects of the situation brought a warning frown to the Emperor's brow. He glared at Derkalas.

"Your imperial Highness," began Derkalas, loftily.

"Your imperial bowels!" yelled Garthanas in a blind rage. He whipped out his sword and sprang forward. "You know why you're going to die—*now!*"

For one brief instant, the old hard gleam of battle flared up in Derkalas' eyes, to be replaced by a shadow of concern which Garthanas had no time to fathom, because his opponent's sword whipped through the air before him with a dexterity that no one who had known "Sorthalas" had ever witnessed or suspected.

As the duel began, the guards began to move toward the fighters, but the Emperor waved them back. His eyes went from the duelists to various noblemen from Muthark. There seemed to be a tacit agreement among them that such swordsmanship was a suspicious discovery.

Adamas could only sit there beside his father and gape at Derkalas, whose presence here was a totally unforeseen development — and he found himself praying even to poor old Zircuth's invisible god, Jehnthavas.

Though Derkalas' sword was the best ever seen on Thronas, Garthanas quickly found openings and drew blood. Derkalas' face now paled and the sharpness faded from his powerful style. He began to back away, his lips trembling.

Suddenly he ran out onto the veranda and leaped up on the stone balustrade. In the same instant he hurled his sword like a spear at Garthanas and jumped to the garden below. Garthanas caught the missile on his own sword and deflected it into a pillar. Hardly hesitating in his flight, he picked the sword up, shoved it into his scabbard and, his own sword in hand, high-jumped over the bal-

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ustrade.

He followed Derkalas through the bushes and along trellised arcades toward the stables where the *kethalii* were kept. Before he got there, he was almost knocked down by the bronze colored *kethalus* that Derkalas had brought with him. Garthanas went after his own *kethalus.*

He galloped after Derkalas, heedless of his surroundings and deaf to the fading shouts of guards and noblemen from the villa. He goaded the giant *kethalus* which had come to know the powerful grip of his legs and the sure, peremptory tug of the reins, and it caught some of his excitement, eagerly trying to overtake the strange *kethalus* that was heading for the mountain trails above the valley.

In spite of the boiling turmoil of his personal emotions now, Garthanas was not disloyal to his friend and benefactor, Prince Adamas, in relation to the Great Plan. Far from upsetting it, this private fight was a fortunate interruption just at a time when the Emperor's clever needling of his emotions might have yielded a clue to his real identity. Although Sorthalas had been revealed as Derkalas, the latter had not mentioned his own real name, and the whole affair even backed up Garthanas' fictitious story—that he was a Thronasian warrior widely experienced in the affairs of Hamardeen. Surely such a veteran from the colonial planet would react in just this way. He would be able to recognize Derkalas, and he would seek to cut him down. Jealousy on the part of the Mutharkian military noblemen might have caused them to question his identity, but even the Emperor knew that Garthanas had been executed at Tharlanthis.

The situation for Adamas and his Plan was still ship-shape, thought Garthanas—and for the time being he could devote himself entirely to his own personal affairs. His body and soul had ached for this sort of action since the day he had returned from the canals and confirmed the treachery of Derkalas. Moreover, his erstwhile battle companion would be able to tell him the whereabouts of Carthis. It was Carthis, above all, who was really important to what was left of his private world. In the midst of his hate for her, he knew that she was the only woman he would ever love.

Then, too, the deathblow that he owed Derkalas was important to the Plan. That he knew he was Garthanas was too important a secret with which to remain alive.

DERKALAS led him far up into the hills, and it was not until they began to ride along the edge of mist-filled chasms that Garthanas recognized their path as the same trail he and Adamas had taken in order to find Zircuth. Fortunately, his own *kethalus* was familiar with the terrain, whereas the

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other animal was not. It could not move as swiftly here as his own mount could.

His quarry disappeared for a while beyond tortuous curves in the dangerous trail. Suddenly, he heard Derkalas shouting at him from a position above him. When he stopped to look up, he instantly goaded his mount and moved out of the way of several great boulders. They crashed onto the trail, splintered, and then fell silently away into the depths below. Garthanas saw Derkalas' head duck back out of sight. The *kethalus* whimpered in its excitement. He goaded it into a gallop.

Around a turn in the trail he discovered a gulley leading upward. In that gulley stood the bronze colored *kethalus,* which had been left behind, as it was unable to proceed over the rougher terrain. It turned and bellowed and snarled at Garthanas' mount, and the latter made a mad, whimpering dash toward it. Garthanas slid to the ground and rolled over just as the two beasts engaged in furious battle.

Sword in hand, he climbed up the gulley swiftly. At the top he discerned a small, flat mesa-like area which jutted out over the trail and the chasm. Derkalas stood there, uncertainly, unable to go anywhere but back into the gulley. He had apparently gambled all his chances on the boulders.

Neither of them said a word at first. Garthanas stood there on the mesa and took out Derkalas' sword. He tossed it to him, which the latter caught easily, whipping it into dueling position even as it reached his hand. Garthanas started slowly forward, eyes narrowed, his face expressionless.

Then Derkalas spoke. "All right, Garthanas, we can fight it out—but there are a few things you ought to know."

Garthanas raised his brown in mock surprise. He stopped advancing and leaned casually on his sword. "That may be proper," he replied, tauntingly. "Say your last words, Derkalas!"

"What I did may appear unforgivable," he began. There were beads of perspiration on his face, and there was a hint of unsteadiness in his voice. "But behind it all was a reason greater than any personal concern of yours or mine. It was for Hamar."

"A lie if I ever heard one," commented Garthanas. "But go on!"

Derkalas' face reddened. "It is not a lie! Do you know why Carthis would never marry any man—even you, whom she loved?"

Now Garthanas' face flushed, angrily. "Where is Carthis?" he demanded, taking a step forward. "If you don't tell me that I'll give you something worse than death—and today I'm just full of ideas!"

"I'll tell you where she is and *who* she is—and then maybe you'll calm that childish temper of yours and listen to reason! This is an affair of Empire—for the Hamarians. Carthis is the daughter of Gial-

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nis. Her real name is *Merlanthis!*"

Garthanas' world darkened in a maelstrom and he swayed dizzily for a moment from shock. Derkalas could have run him through at that moment, had he known it. Then, vaguely, through the mist covering his eyes he made out Derkalas' figure, still standing in the same place. The two men stared at each other.

Merlanthis — the clever beauty who wanted to be Empress! His dark haired dancing girl of Hamardeen—his private love. The choice of Thamas I for Adamas, and Yevea's rival. The girl who had come back home when she learned her mother's estate had been returned, who knew, perhaps, the personal aspects of the situation, and realized she might have a chance of marrying the Prince of Muthark. No wonder she had waited for the chance, wherever her personal passions were or to whom they might be dedicated. Was it truly a plan for Hamar she had in mind—or a thirst for power?

He was suddenly aware that Derkalas was talking to him.

"She had actually hoped to get you to take her to Thronas, but after your enslavement on the canals the time was growing short for her and she told me it was my duty to take the gold and get her to Thronas. She said her mother had lost a cousin years ago, so I took the part of the cousin and posed as a relative. Money and the phoney relationship did the rest. And soon she'll marry Adamas. When he gets the key to the Golden Ship's power from his father, she'll take it, and Hamar will be freed!"

Derkalas watched Garthanas warily, tensing swiftly as he discerned that the other considered half of it a lie. "It's true, I swear it!" he exclaimed.

Garthanas came at him, and Derkalas turned a furious defense almost into an offensive. Had the warloads of Muthark been able to witness the duel they might have learned new tricks. Garthanas felt his chest grow warm with blood as Derkalas sliced under his guard, but was satisfied to see a deep, scarlet gash appear on his opponent's face, from ear to chin. Each wound received made each of them more wary. They fought, finally, almost hopelessly matched to each other, and the duel became a matter of sheer endurance.

Bleeding, exhausted, gasping for breath, they both lowered their swords and looked at each other, in silent agreement that each would give the other a chance to catch his second wind.

"You're the worst kind of liar," gasped Garthanas, finally. "Do you know why? Because you've learned to lie to yourself!"

Derkalas could not reply. He was breathing too hard, and too weak from loss of blood. He could only watch Garthanas and listen.

"The human mind is a clever device," Garthanas continued, oblivi-

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ous to the blood matted on his chest. "If you had to admit the truth to yourself — you'd jump over that cliff and save me the trouble of killing you."

Derkalas watched him closely now, his eyes widening in fear.

"It was no altruistic motive involving Hamarians that led you to run away with Carthis. You call her Merlanthis, but to me she'll always be Carthis. Shall I tell you what it really was—so you can face it?"

Derkalas almost screamed. "It was for Hamar!"

Garthanas took a step toward him and he stepped back. "It was the lust for power—"

"Freedom for Hamar!" screamed Derkalas, his lips trembling. He raised his sword.

"And gold—" Another step forward, Garthanas' sword came up also.

"No, Garthanas! You lie!"

Derkalas closed with him, slicing furiously to get through his guard.

"And a lust for Carthis—for her lips—"

"You're mad!" Derkalas fought recklessly now, as though Garthanas were a cancerous growth in his own consciousness which had to be severed for the sake of sanity.

"And her arms—" Garthanas played with him now, deliberately sadistic.

"Garthanas! I swear—"

"And her naked body!" He struck home, laying open Derkalas' shoulder. Then he stopped, abruptly, and watched the other squirm with pain.

"Derkalas—was it really for Hamar that you left your wife and children? Unprotected? Alone — to forage for themselves?"

Flecks of foam were at the corners of Derkalas' mouth. "Yes! Yes!" he gasped.

"Know, Derkalas, that I held your dead wife in my arms and thought of you and your lofty purposes—and I burned her and your two dead children. Envision that, Derkalas, and tell me, was it flesh or spirit that took you to Thronas?"

He lifted his sword. As Derkalas lifted his, Garthanas flicked it out of his hand. It went flying into the chasm, and Derkalas stood there defenseless with the point of a sword aimed at his heart. He stared at it wildly. Then he stared just as wildly at Garthanas, into his narrowed eyes.

"Do it!" he screamed. "Kill me! Why don't you kill me!"

Then Garthanas' face broke into a slow smile. A deep-chested chuckle began which turned into a laugh. "Now that you can't believe your own lie," he laughed, "you'd like to die!"

"Garthanas!" shrieked Derkalas, frothing at the mouth.

"Well I'm going to let you *live* with yourself! *That* is worse than death, isn't it? Think of your wife and children—weigh them in the balance against gold and Carthis'

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flesh!"

Derkalas turned and sprang into the chasm with a wild yell. Garthanas stood there with his bloodied sword and sobbed, unable to contain the volcano of hate, frustration and disillusionment that raged within him.

Far away and below him he could make out the yellow egg that was the Golden Ship hovering over Hedenas. He could have sworn it was aware of him and what had happened.

He looked up at the sky with its daylight stars glimmering through—up there where Zircuth always found Jehnthavas. Down below was a metal god. Up there was an invisible god—and in between stood Shivathis, a goddess of stone.

Garthanas looked long at the sky until the moisture in his eyes had dried. Then he said, "Who is responsible for the world—Man or God?" After another moment, his teeth flashed. "Don't ever give it to me—or I'll destroy it!"

WHEN he turned to leave, he stopped short, staring in astonishment at Zircuth, who had climbed the gulley and now stood there on the mesa. His Shivathis was gone, and there was an inspired light in his old eyes as he regarded Garthanas.

"How long have you been standing there?" asked Garthanas, gruffly. He was not too pleased with the priest's secretiveness concerning the Hedenas mysteries, or with the fact that Zircuth had taken to the hills again in a time of emergency.

"Garthanas! You were looking at the sky when you said those words—about Man and God! Were you addressing Jehnthavas?"

"Never mind that!" Garthanas strode over to him and grasped him by his robe. "I want you to tell me these secrets you keep hiding," he demanded. "I don't care what threat seals your lips, because I feel what you know is vitally important. So I'll give you a bigger threat!" He held up his sword. "Tell me what it's all about, or you'll follow Derkalas! Not Sorthalas — Derkalas, my old battle companion from Hamardeen — a man who betrayed himself, his family and his friends and his people for things that turn to dust! Don't *you* do the same!"

Strangely, Zircuth showed not the slightest trace of fear, nor of anger. He only smiled and looked Garthanas straight in the eye. "There is no need of threats," he answered. "What I can tell my intimate friends I will tell. What I cannot tell I will not. And if I must die, then let Jehnthavas take me."

Garthanas looked into his eyes and remembered the same type of fearlessness he had witnessed in the mendicant priest of Hamardeen. He wondered where such inner strength came from, but he forced himself to get back to

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reality. He shook Zircuth.

"What is this mystery about Adamas and Yevea?" he demanded.

"I—have come to the hills precisely to—ask Jehnthavas what I should do about that," replied Zircuth. "In regard to Yevea, that is the only secret which I was bound to keep on the mere threat of death."

"Who bound you?"

"The Emperor."

"Why!"

"Because he hates all Hamarians and he hated her real parents. They were the last descendants of the House of Hamar. And the circumstances surrounding Yevea's birth were so bitter to Thamas I that he took revenge on her for what happened."

Garthanas' eyes opened wide. "Then—Yevea is *not* Adamas' sister! And you let those two go through life, suffering for love of one another, when all the time—"

"Sometimes—" Zircuth interrupted, "the cup was consolation to me, but at other times there was only Jehnthavas. You see, at first it was the threat of death that silenced me, but recently it was a desire to see Adamas become Emperor that held me back. If he know Yevea was not his sister he would give up the Throne, itself, to marry her, and he would not marry Merlanthis, his father's choice."

Merlanthis! Garthanas' hand trembled slightly and Zircuth looked down at it, wonderingly.

"Tell me about it," said Garthanas, at length. "What is Yevea's true story?"

Zircuth hesitated, as though assembling in his mind that which could be told and that which had to be withheld. Finally, he began.

Adamas was only three years old when his father discerned that he was not the type to make an Emperor. He wanted another son. The mother of Adamas, that same mysterious beauty who had been the model for Shivathis in the local temple, gave birth to a baby girl. So embittered was Thamas I over this news that he swore he'd make the girl into an Empress rather than raise Adamas to the Throne. At this time the last of the noble line of the House of Hamar had been discovered among Hamarian slaves, and the two of them, a young man and his cousin, were kept at Hedenas to serve Thamas I. The two were in love and the girl conceived a child, also a girl. There was a coincidence in that both Thamas I's wife and this Hamarian girl lay abed with their female infants on the day of the great earthquake, while Thamas I was away in Muthark. The earthquake killed many people at Hedenas, including the Hamarian slave prince and the two mothers. One of the infants was also killed, but one was rescued from the falling wreckage by a slave. Thamas I, terribly embittered by the loss of his beautiful young wife and his

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newborn child, refused to believe that the rescued infant was not his own. He started to raise her as his daughter until her blond hair and blue eyes and fair complexion made it evident that she was the very last of the House of Hamar. Sadistically, then, he conceived the plan of continuing the fiction that she was his daughter, on whom he took secret revenge for all that had happened to him. His injury in a duel had added nothing to his happiness, either, because now he was really incapable of having an heir. Later, when it was evident that Adamas and Yevea were in love, the Emperor enjoyed his secret all the more.

"All right," said Garthanas, when Zircuth had finished, "now tell me what you're holding back. Thamas I had other wives, whom he killed in order to bury the secret of Adamas' mother. What is that secret?"

Now the calm courage was gone from Zircuth's eyes. "Don't ask me that," he pleaded. "Later, when it no longer matters—"

"Never mind. I've learned enough for now." Garthanas turned to go.

"Wait!" Zircuth placed a hand on his arm. "You are not going to tell Adamas the truth, are you? If he knows it, he will not be Emperor, and you know what that means to your Plan. Tomorrow or the next day he is to marry Merlanthis, at which time, according to imperial custom, he will receive imperial power and the key to the Golden Ship."

Garthanas studied Zircuth for a long moment without speaking. Then he left him and climbed down the gulley. The bronze colored *kethalus* was gone, but his own mount still waited there, wagging its giant tail like an innocent puppy.

"Garthanas!" he heard Zircuth cry out after him.

But he mounted and rode away.

THROUGH narrowed eyes he watched the valley of Hedenas unfold before him as he descended the trail. There was much to consider. The sword wound on his chest pained him and his head ached from the shock of revelations and the aftermath of emotions resulting from his fight and the suicide of Derkalas.

Merlanthis was Carthis, whom he both hated and loved. She had to marry Adamas if the key to the power of the Golden Ship was to be obtained from Thamas I. Yet Adamas loved Yevea, who was not his sister. The two had a legitimate right to each other. Thus, for the sake of the Plan, Carthis was to be lost to him and Yevea was to be lost to Adamas.

The more he thought about it the more his head ached.

When he reached the bottom of the trail, he was far below the villa, at the edge of the sugar root fields, where almost a hundred Hamarian slaves were at work. They glared at him sullenly as he

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approached them, but they were also intent upon a group of mounted guards and officers who were riding rapidly in their direction from the villa.

Garthanas came to a stop, suddenly aware of this latter group. Soon he made out the riding figures of the Emperor and Adamas, followed by at least thirty guards and high ranking officers from Muthark. There was an ominous aspect to the picture, inasmuch as all of them had their swords drawn except Adamas, whose hands were tied to his saddle.

The slaves stopped their work to drop to one knee, facing the Emperor only because their half-breed slave-master forced them to. Garthanas tensed, waiting, innocently allowing his sword to remain in its scabbard. But his pulse was racing again in the face of an obvious new emergency.

Above him the Golden Ship hovered in what appeared to be sadistic repose.

When the mounted party drew near enough for Garthanas to make out the expressions on their faces, he discerned in Adamas' features a look of both horror and desperation—and frantic appeal. It required only one swift glance at Thamas I to ascertain that the Emperor had discovered the Plan against him and was enjoying the potentialities immensely. His lips had thinned out into a malicious smile, and his deep set eyes fairly sparkled with deadly intent. Other noblemen were grinning smugly. Mounted guards immediately surrounded Garthanas and deprived him of his sword. The astounded slaves in the field were forgotten.

"What is the meaning of this?" Garthanas demanded indignantly, without paying the Emperor the slightest tribute of deference.

One of the guards was about to slap him across the mouth when the Emperor signalled him to desist. He rested his sword arm across the peak of his saddle and looked amused.

"We owe you a debt of gratitude for having taken care of our erstwhile enemy, Derkalas." The Emperor looked at the wound on Garthanas' chest. "That is, I assume you have disposed of him?"

"Yes—he is dead." Garthanas did not like the other's easy acceptance of the fact that Sorthalas was Derkalas. It meant that other evidence had come to light.

"The most curious bit of news has come to me," continued Thamas I. "It seems that my own son has deceived me—that Garthanas had been executed on Hamardeen. It appears very much as though you, yourself, would answer the description of the famed Hamarian Sword. Tell me—are you not Garthanas?"

Adamas flashed him a look of helpless appeal.

"That is ridiculous," he said, with easy conviction. "In the first place, Garthanas was a slave on the canals and wore the brand. In

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the second place, I have just killed his closest companion—Derkalas. I should think—"

"Never mind all that. Let me bring you up to date regarding the latest events. The last trip of the Golden Ship brought from Hamardeen *all* of the remaining Thronasian guards and officials. I wonder if you perceive the significance of that."

It was extremely significant. Garthanas' fists began to clench. This was actual preparation for the destruction of Hamardeen. The incredibly horrible deed was going to be carried out!

"That is one way," said Garthanas, through his teeth, "to assure yourself fame in the records of all future history—as the darkest fiend ever born to Man."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Emperor, pleasantly. "I see you perceive one facet of the potentialities. But what else is involved?"

Garthanas' eyes narrowed as he gazed at Thamas I and thought. If all the Thronasian guards had been brought home to Thronas—

He started.

"Aha! It has come to you! There should be some present who will be able to identify you. As a matter of fact there is one person in particular who knows your entire story and all about Derkalas. He has just arrived, traveling rapidly overland from Muthark to warn me." The Emperor turned in his saddle. "Xanthas! Would you please come forward and identify the prisoner?"

Garthanas' legs stiffened so that he rose in his saddle, straining to see his old enemy. And there he was, riding smugly forward, tall and proud in his saddle, enjoying an egotist's Paradise.

"At first I thought as Morkalas did," said Xanthas, drawing his mount in beside the Emperor. "I really thought you died there that day in the amphitheatre." Garthanas noted a deep scar across the other's face—and remembered the tangled fight among the *kruthii*. He wished fervently the beasts had killed Xanthas.

"This is still a conjuror's story," he insisted, glaring at the other and wondering which sword was nearest his hand.

"So it might seem," retorted Xanthas, confidently, "were it not for the tearful evidence surrendered by a pretty young Hamarian girl named Ceranthis."

Garthanas shot a startled glance at Adamas. Ceranthis!—the beautiful young virgin who had been sent to him by the mothers of Hamar. She had sworn—

Xanthas shook his head sadly. "This noble habit of yours, always to pay your debts," he said. "Think of the irony of it, Garthanas. A few pieces of gold paid to my pet spy, Kurdas, the innkeeper, and the plans of Empire fall to dust! Naturally he thought the girl's story to be quite strange, so he did me the honor of letting me analyze the facts for him. Of course the poor

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little child needed persuasion—but pain is a truthful surgeon."

Garthanas bellowed, lunging forward to get his hands at Xanthas' throat. He was brought up short on the points of three swords, one of them being that of Thamas I, himself. And one of them was that of Xanthas.

"There is no need to get excited now," put in the Emperor, triumphantly. "Your plan has failed, so why try to defend it. My son has deceived me and plotted against me. The full details of that plot are not yet known to me, but it no longer matters. Adamas will never be Emperor. In time I shall name a successor and meanwhile I shall proceed to make Thronas safe for all time against the treacheries of Hamar. Soon the Golden Ship will move on Hamardeen, and the entire planet will be shattered to pieces."

Garthanas made his mount rise up on its hind legs, and at the same time he tore a sword from the hand of a guard. He lunged at Xanthas, only to meet the other's quick defense. In the same instant, Xanthas struck through and sliced his forehead, an accidental strike which tore away the artificial covering. The slave brand glared against a background of blood. The lucky blow startled Xanthas just long enough for Garthanas to run him through.

"Garthanas!" shouted the small army of slaves who had witnessed all this.

As the ragged Hamarians swarmed over the *kethalii* and started pulling the startled guards and noblemen from their saddles, Garthanas found himself at sword-points with the Emperor, himself. He struck at him viciously, only to meet an effortless guard and to know that *this* was a master sword to match his talents. Thamas I was laughing at him.

"Fool!" he shouted. "The *ship* protects me! I apologize for the advantage!"

He had forgotten the Golden Ship. It was true. The metal god had even told him that it was the servant and protector of the leader of men.

So Garthanas stabbed the Emperor's mount just behind the left leg, and found its heart. It fell, and with it went Thamas I, shouting in sudden rage.

The surge and press of yelping, bellowing *kethalii* and guards and shrieking slaves brought him next to Adamas, who was shouting at him, holding up his fettered wrists.

"You taught me how to use a sword!" he cried. "Now give me one!"

Garthanas sliced the thongs with one expert flick of his sword, and in the same instant the half-breed slave master shoved somebody else's sword into the prince's hand, grinning happily just as a Mutharkian nobleman ran him through. And Adamas turned in time to sever the nobleman's jugular vein.

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The two of them fought, taking full advantage of the help from the Hamarian slaves. Adamas had apparently learned much from Garthanas, because he surprised every one of his attackers. Finally, he and Garthanas became separated for one brief moment from the others and a solid phalanx of slaves filled the gap.

"Go!" they shouted. Of the original group of thirty mounted warriors there were only ten alive and in their saddles, and even these were fighting for their lives because the slaves had picked up swords from dead hands and mounted *kethalii*, themselves.

Adamas and Garthanas galloped up the old trail into the hills, as the distant sun of Thronas sank low toward the sea.

THEY rode upward, far into the mountain wilderness, until it was night and the stars blazed down at them in a thinning sky. Low on the horizon, following the trail of the sun, was the small red light of Hamardeen — and both men were wondering if the Golden Ship was mighty enough to blot it out.

"We've got to stop the Emperor," said Garthanas, when they finally stopped to rest their gasping mounts.

"He is insane," replied Adamas, "and the Golden Ship is his to command. Our Plan is ruined. We are both fugitives from the Empire, and soon Hamardeen will be destroyed. What is there left, Garthanas?"

Garthanas looked up at the stars and thought of Zircuth and the god who shared himself with men, giving to each a spark of the power of creation. If such a thing could only be believed.

"What is left?" he mused. "Ourselves."

"And futility . . . Garthanas, have you seen Yevea?"

"I thought she was at the villa."

"No. Just before I was arrested I learned that she had gone into the hills. I am afraid that rather than see me married to Merlanthis she preferred to kill herself."

Garthanas started in his saddle. "By the gods!" he exclaimed. "I forgot to tell you—or rather, I haven't had a chance. Adamas—go and find her, quickly!"

"Why? What is it you forgot to tell me?"

"This is going to be a shock to you, so prepare yourself. Now that our Plan is dead, your marriage to Merlanthis is insignificant, isn't it?"

"Of course—but what are you getting at?"

"I have dragged a confession out of Zircuth. There is no time to go into details. You'll have to accept my word for it."

"But *tell* me!"

"Yevea — now brace yourself and keep your head—Yevea is *not* your sister."

Garthanas could not see his companion's face very well in the

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starlight. Adamas only sat there in his saddle, speechless, for perhaps a minute.

Suddenly, he goaded his *kethalus* and galloped away toward the old trail.

"Adamas! Wait!"

There was no reply, and finally Garthanas shrugged.

What bitter irony *that* would be, he thought, for Adamas to learn that no barriers whatever stood between him and Yevea—except death by suicide.

LATER that night, Garthanas trapped an unwary guard on the outskirts of Hedenas and made him tell where Gialnis lived.

"You'll not live long, Garthanas," snarled the guard, lying under the other's foot and the point of his sword. "The latest imperial decree is that all Hamarians are to be killed, meaning those on Thronas—as well as every Hamarian sympathizer. There is a reward of one million *galunii* for you—dead or alive."

Which were the last words ever spoken by that particular guard. Garthanas moved swiftly across the valley. The place was not far.

It was another villa, in a smaller valley beyond the adjacent ridge of foothills. He dismounted on the outskirts of the grounds and tied up his *kethalus*. Then he proceeded toward the villa, itself, on foot.

In peculiar contrast to the villa at Hedenas, there were few lights in evidence here, and even though he searched the place he could not find a single guard. He assumed they were out hunting for him or killing off Hamarians. In both valleys he had discerned distant fires marking funeral pyres for the mounting dead. He felt nauseated. This was a carnival of murder. In Muthark it must be a flaming abattoir, as there were still thousands of Hamarian slaves available there.

He had one desperate plan left, but before he gambled his life in the attempt to save Hamardeen he had to see Carthis. The gods could wait a moment longer. They had all eternity to themselves. He had only hours at the most.

He found a lighted room, one of those smaller, more personalized rooms assigned permanently to one of the residents of the villa. Obviously it was a woman's room. An oil lamp sputtered beside a sleeping couch, across which lay several robes which someone had been embroidering. He was just about to turn to go on to other rooms when someone entered. The woman did not scream. She only drew in her breath sharply, then stood there petrified, staring at him.

As he turned to face her, she said, "Garthanas!"

He saw a middle aged woman who seemed to be more Hamarian than Thronasian. Her eyes were blue, her hair a pleasant compromise between light and dark. In those eyes and the lines of her face

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was the story of years—longing, frustration, disillusionment. It was a kind face, but weakened by uncertainty and indecision. She had been clutching at a Shivathis which hung from her neck, but when he turned and she recognized him by his description and the slave brand she started so that the little chain broke. The little Shivathis lay there in her hand.

"You must be Gialnis," said Garthanas.

She nodded her head slightly, staring at him in wondering fascination, from head to foot. "You must go," she said, finally. "There is a price on your head."

"Where is Carthis?"

Her eyes widened in fear. "You mean Merlanthis. That is her real name. She has told me all about you—and her. Surely you have not come here to—"

"No harm will come to her. I've got to see her. And to me she is Carthis."

"You're not going to take her away."

"No. Not where I'm going. But I've got to see her. Where is she?"

"On the roof. She wanted to be alone when she heard—about—"

"About having lost her chance of becoming Empress?" He hissed the last word.

"That was a shock—but mention of you was what caused her to break down and—"

Garthanas moved forward and pulled Gialnis into the room. He told her to stay there. As he started to close the door, he noticed that she had dropped her Shivathis on the floor. He paused long enough to pick it up.

"Here," he said, handing it to her. "Take your 'Mugu.'" And with that he locked her in and headed for the roof.

There were several roof gardens, one of them devoted to the worship of the lesser household gods, and one devoted to personal relaxation. This latter one offered the luxury of a fountain and pool, inasmuch as the villa stood close to the side of the hill, where artisans had taken advantage of a natural spring and diverted it across a marble arched aqueduct to the roof. It was here that he found Carthis.

She stood there beside the fountain in a black robe that matched the darkness of her hair, which had been let down, and now it hung almost to her waist, making of her face a pale island of seemingly aethereal beauty in the starlight. He came to within two *talii* of her and stopped, taking her in with his eyes for the first time in over five years. The romantic, victorious days together in Tharlanthis seemed to have been a previous incarnation, so much had transpired since that time, and he had waited so long, with his heart and recently with his hatred and bitterness.

That she recognized him he had no doubt, because otherwise she would have objected to the intrusion of a stranger here. A minute

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passed, without either one saying a word.

Finally, he slowly extracted a few coins from his pouch and tossed them onto the roof tiles at her feet. "Perhaps the gay dancing girl of Tharlanthis would care to entertain her audience."

"Garthanas!" she exclaimed. "You fool! Why have you come here?"

"Why, to see my lost love again —who has waited so faithfully for my return. Or would you rather have me go so that I do not endanger your house by my presence? You were not afraid of danger in the old days, Carthis."

"What I have done is a thing divorced from personal considerations," she retorted.

"What a strange coincidence! That is the same story told to me today by our mutual friend, Derkalas—"

"Derk—Sorthalas! Where is he? They say you—"

"Derkalas was the name, Carthis. He had the same pretty lie on his lips before he admitted what was really behind your historic flight to Thronas together. I didn't kill him, Carthis. When the lie dissolved before his eyes he was able to take one good look at himself—and he jumped over a cliff. Is that what you would care to do?"

She was silent, stunned by the confirmation of Derkalas' death, and Garthanas knew she realized one more pillar had fallen from the structure of her plans. Today had been one of earthquakes for her—the arrival of the Emperor at Hedenas and the sudden imminence of her wedding to Adamas, only to be followed by his arrest and the appearance of himself on the scene. Hamardeen threatened with extinction, the local Hamarians falling before imperial swords, Derkalas dead, and her own chance at the key to power lost forever.

Suddenly, she gave a little cry and ran to him, throwing herself into his arms. "Garthanas! Oh my love, what has become of us?" She clutched his head in her hands and drew his lips down to hers.

He knew it was genuine, because he knew his woman well, and for the moment he succumbed to the hunger of years. This was the farewell to life he had come for. In words there might be deception, but that which held them fiercely together now was a truth that required no analysis.

"I know you always loved me," he said, at length, still holding her close, talking into her ear. "But people can become torn between love and—other thirsts."

"Darling, don't talk—don't spoil —"

"The thirst for power. You dreamed of it secretly all your life. That's why you could marry no one but the Prince of Muthark."

"Garthanas! Please!" She tried to seal his lips with hers. "Just hold me, love!"

Suddenly, he jerked her from

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him and held her at arm's length, deliberately crushing her with his grip. "Ah, tonight was made for love, Carthis—while thousands of Hamarians die and their funeral pyres light the sky—while the Golden Ship awaits the Emperor's commands to destroy our world of Hamardeen!" He slapped her hard. "Now tell me that you planned all this with Derkalas for the sacred cause of Hamar!"

She held her face and cried from the pain of the slap. "All right!" she sobbed. "I had a chance at the Throne! You want me to be honest. Yes! I wanted it all—like any woman with sense—wealth, power, security, and anything I desired—even you! Adamas could have had his secret love. I had mine. Derkalas was merely a stupid fool who believed everything I told him. I knew what *he* wanted, but he never got it!"

He stared at her silently. Finally she reached out to him and he drew her close again. "Garthanas, what is left?" she cried, bitterly.

"Just—this moment. That's all, Carthis. After that—"

She clung to him fiercely, digging her nails into his arms. "I want you!" she whispered, between their kisses.

Suddenly, they heard the sound of many guards running up the stairs toward the roof. They made out one phrase the officer was shouting back at his men.

"The Emperor was right! Merlanthis was the bait we needed. He's here!"

Garthanas looked down at Carthis, a grim smile on his lips. "Wealth and security, darling," he said. "One million *galunii* reward for me—and continued favoritism with the Emperor—"

"Garthanas!" she exclaimed. "I didn't—"

He shoved her from him. "Well *do* it then! For your mother's sake—turn me in! But they'll have to try and catch me!"

She cried after him as he ran toward the narrow aqueduct arch that led to the hillside. He traversed the precarious trough, splashing water and almost falling twice into the garden below. He reached the shelter of bushes just as the guards reached the roof. Then he crouched low and began working back to where he had left his *kethalus*. There was still work to be done before he died, and if the Golden Ship still sat on the ground at Hedenas where he had seen it last—there still might be a chance for Hamardeen.

When he entered the greater valley of Hedenas there were at least a hundred funeral fires there, which was sufficient illumination to light up the great hull of the Golden Ship where it lay just below the sugar plant and the winery. Guards had trailed him with hunting *kethalii* and were close behind him. He finally abandoned all attempts to conceal himself and broke into a gallop in the direction of the ship. A cry from his pursuers

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went up and the chase was on.

Evidently they had been so sure of themselves with regard to the Emperor's advice that he would be found visiting Merlanthis that they were all on his trail. Which left him a clear path to the ship. When they saw him enter it they even slowed their pace, sure that they had him at last. At least there were guards on board the ship, and before he could try to escape they would have the single exit blocked. The Emperor, himself, was on board, with all his honor guard and the Mutharkian noblemen, ready to leave for the capital city of Thronas. They wondered if Garthanas had lost his mind to go in there. If he were intent upon assassinating the Emperor before he was captured, had he forgotten the metal god who would strike him dead if others did not?

Far from forgetting the metal god of the Golden Ship, Garthanas had chosen its forbidden chamber as his goal. They would not dare to follow him there—and even if they did it might not matter, because either he would be dead, or the metal god—or both.

He was halfway through the ship before he encountered resistance. Three guards closed with him in the large observation chamber. The single guard who finally escaped from that encounter reasoned that he would have a story of swordsmanship to relate to his grandchildren. Garthanas knew the way well from there, as it was the route he had followed while chasing the *qulnus*.

Other guards were in sight of him when he turned the last corner into the short passage that terminated at the ominous circular hatch. They shouted at him when he opened the hatch and went inside—into that eerie chamber of whispering darkness. Nor did they follow. A few waited outside for a while, while others went away to inform the Emperor to the effect that Garthanas had committed suicide.

THE first thing Garthanas saw was the mouldering skeleton on the floor, reminding him that his own intentions in this place were directly related with that lugubrious symbol of death. If Death were a god, he would be here now at his side, grinning like that timeless skull, in anticipation. In this dim chamber, with its mysterious, rustling sounds and its lambent lights and aura of superhuman power, lay the fate of Hamardeen—millions of fair-haired, blue-eyed people who mourned him for dead, and the entire physical body of the planet, itself.

The clicking and rustling was a mere complement to silence, the racing little lights were a thousand eyes to emphasize the darkness of the Unknown. The metal god waited, supreme in its confidence and infinite power. Garthanas braced himself, actually calling upon Jehnthavas to instill in him a part

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of that godliness which He was supposed to share with mortal men.

He tensed for his charge, with raised sword, staring at a distant bank of glowing tubes and instruments which seemed to him to be most vital.

Then the floor pressed suddenly against his feet, signifying that the ship was under way—back to Muthark. It unnerved him for a moment.

"Do not make the attempt," came the voice of the god, speaking to him from nowhere and everywhere. *"Your sword would dissolve before it ever touched me."*

Garthanas did not know how long he stood there, after that, waiting and thinking, his sword still poised in mid air, his muscles painfully tense, as the great ship sped onward through the night toward Muthark.

Finally, he said aloud, "If you read my mind—you know it is not you I actually wish to destroy. It is your power in the hands of a madman. This is the only way—"

Silence—except for the indefinable rustling and clicking. Garthanas could hear himself breathing hard.

"You say you are the servant and protector of the leader of men," he continued, finally. "But can this hold true when the leader you serve and protect is a ruthless tyrant who uses your inhuman powers to destroy a people—an entire planet?"

More silence. It maddened him. He shouted at the metal god.

"Destroy this accursed world if you must—but leave Hamardeen alone! Here is nothing but lust and greed for power and position—and—spiritual anarchy!"

"I know nothing of the spirit," replied the eerie voice. *"I am the creation of Man, and I have been built to serve and protect the duly authorized leader of men in any given generation."*

Garthanas pressed against the wall, his eyes open wide in the darkness, the sword almost dropping from his fingers. "Then—you are *not*—a god?"

"I am a machine."

To Garthanas, a machine was a winch or a wine press or a sugar root mill. If this all powerful, versatile entity was a machine, capable of traversing the star-seas and wiping planets out of existence, then it might as well be a god. Or its makers were gods, whose superhuman will had been preserved in their miraculous creation. That was it! If their will and their logic was built into this—this machine—then through that very medium he might appeal to them, even though they had ceased to exist.

As when the mendicant priest had spoken to him long ago, a coldness crept over the back of his neck. He was about to appeal to the dead of an unknown race of gods.

"You are a servant and protec-

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tor of the leader of men," he began, choosing his words carefully, "because this was the will and intention of your makers. It is to your makers that you are obedient, fundamentally."

Again—silence.

"Your makers were human beings, but since they made you—*they* are your god. I am a human being, and I think as they did. I can give you understanding of their real will and intent. They sought, first of all, to protect human society, by protecting their leaders — because those leaders were benevolent. But this present leader—this Thamas I, Emperor of Muthark—is a murderer of people and a destroyer of worlds."

"You are asking me to make an independent decision of my own—to evaluate between alternative actions. I am not so constructed. While mortal man rightfully holds the key to my power, I am not free to dispose."

"Ah! The *rightful* possession, yes! But who can say that this Emperor's possession of that key is rightful?"

"It is in accordance with the disposition of your own laws on Thronas. The House of Muthark is in power, and its heirs shall lead you. I can serve only that leader, as long as he holds the key."

"What is that key?" asked Garthanas, tensely. "And where is it?"

"It is the control crystal—in the center of the medallion, worn by the Emperor. Whoever takes it unrightfully must die."

Garthanas felt his pulse surge. His head throbbed. Here, at last, was a vital revelation. But there was also a mystery attached to it. Why had the machine told him the secret? In fact, why should it bother to speak to him at all? How was he still alive when his predecessors in this chamber had died?

Just then, he heard someone manipulating the mechanism of the hatch. He lunged forward and fell on his face on the deck alongside the skeleton, pretending that he was dead.

Light from the passageway flooded in as the hatch swung back. He heard the tense whispering of guards and noblemen. But then the quiet voice of the Emperor came to him.

"There! I had to see it with my own eyes, to make sure he was dead."

"Then close the hatch, your Highness!" pleaded someone else. "We are in danger!"

"It is a pity one of you is not brave enough to enter there and pull him out. He is partly a man and partly a legend. There is only one sure way of making this legend die. I could send him to Hamardeen to join his beloved people!"

This suggestion of the Emperor's was met with silence.

"Very well, then, *I* shall pull him out!"

"No—your Highness! Not even you—"

"I am the Emperor, if you

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please!" Thamas I had actually entered the chamber.

"Come back! You will die! All others before you who tried—"

Garthanas tensed, aware that his sword was till in hand. The Emperor came closer to him, cautiously.

In that moment a great light filled the chamber—a blinding, purplish light accompanied by an ominous crackling sound.

"Back! Back—for your life!" someone shouted.

As the Emperor retreated hastily, the light and the crackling sounds subsided.

"The fools!" exclaimed Thamas I aloud to himself. "They run away like frightened *mergralii.*" He stood at the hatchway, ready to close it, but he addressed the machine, which to him was still a mysterious metal god who served him. "All right," he said, "I recognize the privacy of your temple. No man may enter it and live. This is good. But now hear my command. As soon as you have taken us to Muthark you will embark upon a journey to Hamardeen, and there you will exert your maximum powers, destroying every living creature that lives and breathes there—and, if you can, the planet, itself. It is time I really struck terror into these pusillanimous idiots who call themselves my subjects!" Having delivered this speech, he closed the hatch and left.

Immediately, Garthanas sprang to his feet and went toward the hatch.

"Stay," said the machine. *"If you attempted to take his life I would have to intervene."*

Garthanas whirled about, shouting back at it. "Then why do you even bother with me!" As it failed to answer, he added, "Why am I not dead beside that heap of bones on the deck? Why did you protect me against being discovered by the Emperor, to whom you claim to be such a servant?"

After a long silence, the machine replied, *"We are close to Muthark. This night you must go into hiding, for the entire Thronasian Army is looking for Hamarians, and they will be looking especially for you if you reveal that you still live. You must get off this ship, because I must make the journey to Hamardeen."*

Garthanas shook his head. There was much here that was beyond him. Finally, he asked, "Can you really destroy a planet? Have you such power?"

"That power is not here. It is in the stars. Such power can be used forever."

"Then you *can* destroy Hamardeen!"

"And the sun—and all its planets, were it so ordered."

"But—you can't destroy Hamardeen!"

"Get off the ship. We are landing."

"You can't!"

"Soon I must leave on my jour-

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ney, which takes eight of your days."

Garthanas took a big breath. He clutched his sword and his eyes narrowed. "All right," he said. "That gives *me* time to work. We'll see if you are going to destroy *anything!*"

The machine did not answer. It was busy maneuvering the huge ship for a landing.

ONE DAY, one night—in Pandemonium. This was Muthark. A massive, sprawling architectural wonder inhabited by madness. Even seeing it with his own eyes, he could not believe it—that Man could come to this.

Disguising himself as best he could, hiding in cellars and sewers, killing his discoverers wherever they found him, chased, hunted, he had made his way slowly toward the Palace, within the Inner City where the Golden Ship had landed. There were some Hamarian slaves in hiding who had even sacrificed their own lives to conceal him, once they knew it was he. Because of the spark of courage his presence gave the last survivors, hiding and shivering in the damp and dark places, it was inevitable that his name should spread among them until the news who whispered among the guards and common soldiery. It crept like a black fire of fear into higher echelons until it reached the Emperor, himself.

Garthanas lived! He was not a man — he was the indestructible soul of the Hamarians. Comment by Thamas I: "Indestructible nonsense! I saw him dead with my own eyes. We must nip this fiction off at its roots. It is but an invention of the condemned." The Emperor placed a price on the head of every last Hamarian, and even the common citizenry joined merrily in the sport, declaring a gay holiday for massacre. The holiday acquired official status in recognition of the ultimate triumph of Thronas.

Once in the darkness beyond midnight Garthanas came upon two Thronasians in a narrow alleyway behind several great houses. There were many lights inside and he had heard the sounds of gayety, of men and women laughing. Through one small air vent he had even caught a glimpse of that mad carousing and celebration inside. One man had come through an exit into the alley to relieve his nausea from eating and drinking, and another had come out with him to assist him.

"Come on, Krathanas," the latter was saying. "Pull yourself together, man. The celebrations are only beginning!" He was drinking from a large goblet, splashing half the liquor over his face.

"But ye gods!" moaned the sick man. "I've been on a party of my own for two days. What's all this new excitement about?"

"I've been trying to tell you, but you've been too busy with those red-headed twins—nor do I blame

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you. We are drinking great toasts tonight — to the might of Muthark!"

"Well—" The man vomited. "We've done that before."

"But you don't get it! This is the master stroke of the Emperor. Hamardeen is to be destroyed by the Golden Ship! The planet, itself, will be shattered into dust. What power, man! The arm of Thronas reaches out across the star-sea to make its mark on the face of the universe!"

"You mean — all the stinking Hamarians in *existence* will be wiped out?"

"Every man, woman and child! There will be only Thronas left. We'll use the *qulnii* for slaves. They're more efficient and haven't got such a damned high opinion of themselves."

"Well, don't bother me now. I've got something more important to work on. Those red-heads are waiting for me."

The other man laughed and took another drink. "You're right! Here's to important work!—wine, women and song! Come on!"

They both turned to re-enter the house, but Garthanas reached out and jerked them into the alley. He enjoyed killing them with his bare hands.

And so it went, through the interminable hours, killing his hunters, hiding and plotting with Hamarian survivors, working deeper into the catacombs beneath the mountainous buildings surrounding the huge Palace, itself. Now there were six days left, before the Golden Ship would reach Hamardeen.

One Hamarian collaborator shaved his beard off and bound his forehead with a bloodied bandage. He managed to trap a guard and acquire his harness. Dye was applied to his skin, darkening him to the shade of a full-blooded Thronasian.

That night, Emperor Thamas I sat at the head of a great banquet table. It was the second day of the great celebrations. The holidays were to continue until the climax, when the little star in the sky that marked the home of the exiled Hamarian race would darken and be gone from the face of the universe. He had planned it this way with careful deliberation. It was to be political showmanship of the highest order, backed by religious propaganda. The high priests of Shivathis were already handing it out in their temples—that this was the punishment of the gods for those who worshipped the false Jehnthavas and dared to resist the might of Muthark. The destruction of Hamardeen was to strike home at the deepest roots of superstition and form the foundation of a totalitarian rule for generations to come. His son's recent deception notwithstanding, Thamas I was well pleased.

Or at least he was trying to convince himself that this was what he wanted. What he really

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wanted he dared not admit to his own conscience, because it could never be had — unless genuine miracles might still be expected of the gods.

In the huge banquet hall were over five hundred noblemen, officials and courtiers, in addition to a small army of paid servants, *qulnii,* honor guards, and entertainers. At the moment, the feature spot on the entertainment list was occupied by swordsmen—common swordsmen from the streets who risked their lives against the top experts of the honor guard in order to win the holiday prizes of fifty thousand *galunii* and the unconditional possession of their choice of a half dozen Hamarian virgins who had been saved for this event. The six girls were chained to pillars along one side of the hall, in plain view of the fighters. Should the honor guard win, the prize went to him, which was usually the case. Thus any one of the latter stood a chance of becoming rich in this single evening, in gold and Hamarian virgins.

Thamas I's greatest diversion was the sword, which explained to all who knew him why it was that the best fighting men of the land surrounded him, attaining to wealth and nobility through their constant exhibitionism. His champion of champions among the guards was one Lerthas, who towered several inches over ordinary men and used a heavier calibre sword than usual. He was always kept in reserve until a commoner won a prize by killing a guard, which was rare. When this happened, the winner was offered a double prize if he could best Lerthas. Blinded by the prospect of unexpected riches and filled with confidence because of one victory, the winner usually succumbed to the temptation—and won nothing but death. In short, this was Lerthas' big night, and Thamas I was laughing at him as he grew rich over the bodies of his victims. A hundred people at the banquet table rose in a body to give Lerthas a toast, at which time he winked at them and turned to pinch the thigh of a particularly voluptuous Hamarian girl tied to one of the pillars.

Suddenly, a messenger came to the Emperor's place at the table.

"Your Highnes," he whispered, making a show of his discreetness because of the known personal nature of his business, "the lady Gialnis is in the outer hall. She begs a private audience immediately, claiming to have news for you of the most extreme importance possible."

"Gialnis!" exclaimed the Emperor. "Here—in Muthark?"

"Yes, your Highness. She has come overland in extreme haste, bringing with her the priest, Zircuth, of Hedenas, and several others. They all seem to be quite agitated, especially the lady Gialnis. She insists that if I fail to urge your attention to this matter you will have me executed, once you

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learn the nature of her business, for having hesitated one moment in telling you that she is here."

"Hmm . . . This is most unusual for Gialnis. And Zircuth!" The Emperor's face darkened. "Now what in the name of the gods has brought those two together over a matter of such importance? If it has anything to do with my erstwhile heir, Adamas, I'm afraid I—"

"Yes! That is it! She insisted that it had everything to do with your son."

At that moment, the master of ceremonies bellowed an announcement, which both the messenger and the Emperor listened to.

"And now, your Imperial Highness, ladies and gentlement of the court, we bring you an unexpected surprise!"

The shouting and gayety of the banquet table quieted down and all eyes turned to the announcer.

"We bring before you — the masked marvel of Thoronis—"

A tall, dark-hued Thronasian stepped into the fighter's area, wearing a black mask over his eyes and a bloodied bandage on his forehead. The spectators began to applaud, enthusiastically, for the innovation. The contestant was almost as tall of Lerthas, himself. The master of ceremonies waved his arms for attention.

"But here this!" He laughed as he announced it. "This mystery fighter wishes to take on Lerthas first of all!"

A mighty shout of approval went up from the long table. Lerthas waved his sword at his audience in equal enthusiasm. Obviously, this masked fool's exhibitionism would only serve to place a brighter feather in his own cap of fame.

"Gialnis will have to wait," said the Emperor. "This is too good to miss."

"With your permission, your Highness, I—"

"Of course! You may stay to watch it!"

It was only then that Thamas I noticed the masked marvel glaring at him. There was something very familiar about that tall, powerful, warrior's figure — something that made him flush with sudden anger, and nameless fear. Involuntarily, the Emperor clutched at the hilt of his own sword. No, he thought, it could not be—this man was a dark-hued Thronasian, not a half-breed. He swore at himself for being a superstitious fool.

Nevertheless, he groped for his medallion for reassurance. The strange, tingling sensation he received from the control crystal told him that the secret raybeam still connected him with the metal god of the Golden Ship, far though it might be on its lonely journey of destruction. Finally, he smiled, grimly. Even if this were the man he was thinking of, it would but provide additional entertainment —in many constructive ways . . . But then again, what he was thinking was impossible.

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Lerthas crossed swords with the stranger from Thoronis. The hall fell silent, watching.

There was a sustained flashing and clash of swords for perhaps half a minute, and suddenly the spectators rose to their feet, tense with astonishment, to see Lerthas sagging backward, pierced straight through his abdomen, dying. But in the course of the brief encounter, both the stranger's mask and bandage had been plucked off his head. He turned to face them, a cancelled slave brand glistening on his wounded forehead, his eyes narrowed and filled with hate.

The Emperor pushed his great chair back, springing to his feet with drawn sword. "Garthanas!" he exclaimed.

"*Garthanas!*" echoed the others, incredulously.

"Garthanas!" cried the chained Hamarian girls, hysterically.

Garthanas started to move toward the Emperor. The honor guard also began to move, but the Emperor waved them back, springing forward into the middle of the room.

"Wait!" he cried. "Back!—all of you!" In his dark eyes was a fanatic gleam of malicious triumph. He had just had the greatest idea of his career. "Here before you is Garthanas, the famed Hamarian Sword — the legend of Hamardeen!" he shouted. "It is rumored by the half-witted Hamarians that he is indestructible—that he is a legend—the soul of his chosen people, who are soon to die."

Garthanas still approached, slowly, deliberately, with readied sword, eyeing his steadily, perhaps even oblivious to what he was saying.

"So that you may not be deluded by this lie, I shall prove to you he is a mortal fool—and that it is *I* who am your indestructible legend! Watch!"

Before anyone could move to interfere, Thamas I closed with Garthanas. In a moment, each man knew he had never before encountered such an opponent, and it took only a minute of the fighting to prove to the spectators that they were looking at the two master swordsmen in existence. Certain high priests of Shivathis who were present watched the spectacle with narrowed eyes, suddenly appreciating their Emperor's master strategy. If he killed this champion here and now, it would fortify their own propaganda for all time to come. And of course the Emperor was not in danger, because he was under the protection of the Golden Ship, as long as he wore the medallion. Moreover, anyone who took the medallion from him was sure to die anyway.

At that moment, the two contestants locked swords. Simultaneously, Garthanas ripped the medallion from the Emperor's neck—and did not die.

He pushed the Emperor back from him, but the latter merely stood there, staring at him. Thamas

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I waited for Garthanas to drop dead. As the latter started to lunge forward with his sword, the honor guard closed in. Hands grasped him from behind; his sword was torn from his hand, and the *moganus* of the guards, himself, prepared to run him through.

At which moment the *moganus* fell dead.

The Emperor's face blanched. Garthanas held the key to power and was not dead! Even more, the metal god had defended him!

"How is it possible?" cried one of the priests of Shivathis. "Always in past history when thieves attempted to take the medallion they died."

In a sudden fury of rage, Thamas I raised his sword to strike Garthanas, unable to believe that the metal god would destroy the rightful possessor of the medallion, which was himself.

"*Stop!*"

This was such a startling shriek that the Emperor actually stopped —to stare at Gialnis, who rushed toward him, followed by Zircuth, an older priest, and some sort of petty official.

"Stop!" she cried. "In the name of all the gods! *This is your son!*"

Silence smote the great hall like some sort of supersonic thunder. The Emperor's sword dropped from benumbed fingers. Garthanas looked from Gialnis to the Emperor, and then he stared at the medallion. In the background, priests and noblemen gripped each other's arms.

"I have brought you *proof*, Thamas! Proof that this Garthanas is your son."

Thamas I glared at her intently, utterly incredulous.

"You will know what I mean when I remind you—" A strange expression of sorrow and frustration crept into Gialnis' eyes. "When I remind you of — Sernathis."

The Emperor started, his eyes wide with surprise. Then he reddened. He suddenly picked up his sword and waved it at the onlookers.

"Clear the hall!" he shouted. His eyes took in Garthanas anxiously, as though he were seeing him for the first time, a great light of comprehension dawning upon him. "Clear the hall—at once! Leave us alone!" As the onlookers began to leave or be shoved out by the guards, he motioned to Gialnis and Zircuth and the other two with them. "You stay," he commanded. "I want to hear this proof—and by the gods!—if you fail in your proof, you'll *all* die!"

"Is life so cheap, Thamas?" queried Gialnis. "Your only real son might have died here tonight."

Garthanas started. "*Only* real son!" he exclaimed. "But — Adamas—"

The Emperor glanced at Zircuth and scowled. "So *that* has come out, too, has it?"

"Why not?" retorted Zircuth, earnestly. The fear was gone from

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his eyes now. He looked almost triumphant. "This is the end of concealment. My lips were sealed as long as Adamas had a chance at the Throne—but now, what is personal shame, or death itself? My years are done."

Garthanas finally found his senses. "All this is too much for me!" he exclaimed. "What is this proof you speak of, Gialnis?"

When his eyes met hers, the old cold feeling was back on his neck again and he remembered what the mendicant priest had told him: "Find you the true mother of your blood—"

His eyes widened, and tears leapt into Gialnis' eyes as she saw that he comprehended. She nodded her head to him, confirming his thoughts.

"You!" he exclaimed.

She came to him crying. "Oh my son! My son! The shame is upon me, too, that I gave you away into the priesthood."

And Hamar shall be free! Garthanas' head was swirling with a confusion of thoughts, memories, and emotions. Each piece of the puzzle fell swiftly together — even the incident with the *qulnus* he had chased to the lair of the machine on board the Golden Ship. The machine had known all the while he was the true heir apparent to the Throne, and had killed the *qulnus*. That is why he, himself, had not died in that eerie chamber; it was why the machine had talked to him and helped to conceal the fact from the Emperor that he lived. And that was why he had not died when he took the medallion. It was rightfully his!

He hugged Gialnis to him and kissed her cheek.

"All right!" demanded Thamas. "The proof!"

Gialnis disengaged herself from Garthanas' arms and tried to get hold of herself. "You remember when my parents withdrew the offer of marriage," she said, "and you came to see me thath last night at Sernathis."

Again, Thamas turned red. "Yes, yes—that is a personal matter, between us. What happened after that?"

Gialnis searched the Emperor's face, longingly. "You loved me then, Thamas."

"Go on—the proof, Gialnis!"

Gialnis turned from him, slowly, and beckoned the older priest, who had been surveying Garthanas' features in wonderment. He clutched his Shivathis and came forward.

"This is the first priest who received and took care of Garthanas —I called him Thanatlas then." She took hold of the priest's Shivathis and held it up for Garthanas to see. "I dropped one of these in my room at the villa when you came there the other night. You picked it up and gave it back to me. What did you call it?"

The word came out involuntarily. "Mugu," he said.

"That was the name he called me by," said the aged priest, en-

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thusiastically. "My name is actually Mugurthas, but all he could say was *Mugu.* And thereafter, everything was 'Mugu.' Especially the Shivathis, with which he often played."

"Then Romuth came to the Throne," continued Gialnis, "and many things changed. Mugurthas was transferred, and other priests were cruel to Thamat — I mean, Garthanas. When he was a very young boy, he ran away. Finally, I learned that some official from Thoronis had adopted him. I have brought you the chief of records in Thoronis. He can give you the name of the foster father and mother."

Thamas I glared at the frightened official. "What are their names?" he asked.

"Your Highness, they were—Kanthas, and the woman—Sarlis. The man was assigned to colonial affairs. He and his wife went away to Hamardeen with the boy, where, our records show, they were all presumably killed during Hamarian uprisings."

"One more proof," said Gialnis. "When I first saw him — he came to the villa to see Merlanthis — I saw the image of yourself, Thamas, as you came to me that night in Sernathis."

"Of course the greatest proof of all," said the Emperor, hastily changing the subject, "is that he holds the medallion and lives. It is a miracle of the gods! This is my only son!" He stared at Garthanas, his face tense with emotion. It was not fatherly emotion. It was one of personal triumph. The onus of never having been able to produce a rightful heir had embittered his life.

"Wait a minute," said Garthanas. "What about this mystery concerning Adamas? I have learned the secret about Yevea—" He glared at his father. "Which was a very artful form of pure sadism. I also know that the lifesized Shivathis in the temple at Hedenas is a likeness of his mother—"

"Solanthis!" ejaculated the Emperor, frowning at Zircuth. "So you've revealed even that!" Suddenly, the frown was replaced by a look of smug superiority. "Well—why not, Zircuth? You might as well reveal yourself."

"Yes," replied Zircuth, calmly. "I am ready to confess my sins—all of them." He turned to Garthanas. "I was a high ranking and important member of the priesthood in those days, and my influences conflicted with those of your father. He wanted to break me in some way, in spite of my great popularity with the people. So he encouraged me to make a perfect Shivathis, using his own wife as a model. He knew that her beauty was dangerous to any man, and he hoped I would be compromised. Solanthis was a passionate and cunning woman, proud of her power over men. I did succumb, and I was broken from my higher offices for it. But the results went farther

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than Thamas anticipated. *Adamas is my son.*"

Now Garthanas could understand the reasons behind some of Thamas I's bitterness. The first son of his first wife was not his own. Her second child was lost in an earthquake when she died, and as a substitute he had the last member of the House of Hamar to raise as a daughter. Then a duel had rendered him sterile. Lacking an heir, he had been forced to masquerade the son of Zircuth as his own offspring when it was obvious the boy took after his real father.

But there was nothing yet to cause him to sympathize with the man who hoped to destroy Hamardeen. He clutched the medallion tightly in his hand, aware of a curious, tingling sensation.

Thamas I fixed him with a stare. "Well, now that you have the medallion, what do you propose to do —rescue your white-livered Hamarians and raise up an image of Jehnthavas in the temples — or utilize the power you possess and enjoy the prestige of Muthark?"

Garthanas stared at the luminescent crystal in the center of the medallion. The others watched him with a growing impatience as he said nothing. However, they saw him sway slightly, just once, as though he were going to fall on his face. When he finally looked up his eyes were bleak. Whether or not his face was pale could not be determined because of the dye with which he had been tinted. But his lips had become parched and his mouth seemed dry when he spoke, even though he smiled. It was such a strange smile that it could not be categorized.

He weighed the medallion in his hand. "I came to this—from the antipodes — an outlaw, a sworn enemy of Empire. But—now that I hold the key to power in my own hand—" He looked around him almost casually. "The sense of values changes."

Zircuth's mouth dropped agape. "Garthanas!" he exclaimed, incredulously.

Gialnis paled, her eyes wide with consternation. She backed away from her son.

Thamas I broke into a comprehending smile. He even began to chuckle.

"I am sorry," he told his father, "that I interrupted the festivities. Let the celebrations continue."

Thamas I clapped him enthusiastically on the shoulder. "*Now* you have seen reality for the first time, son. It is all well and good for the have-nots to bolster themselves with high sounding ideals and philosophy, but all of us are human beings. Once you are on *this* side of the fence, it's different!"

Garthanas looked at his mother, Gialnis. "Tell Merlanthis I would see her here. There is nothing to prevent our marriage now. Tell her I shall be Emperor—that should bring her."

Gialnis' face showed every wrinkle now. Her lips were compressed

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in anger and disappointment. "You seem to forget that Merlanthis was my child by my legitimate husband, who has since died. That makes her your sister."

"Half-sister," said Garthanas, expressionlessly.

"*Blood* sister!" retorted Gialnis. "The gods forbid it!"

Garthanas smiled the same smile again. "Just tell her what I said," he answered. "Let us see what she decides."

Zircuth pointed to the chained Hamarian virgins. "There's a final test!" he cried out. "What do you intend to do with them!"

Thamas I eyed his son carefully, and Garthanas met his gaze easily. He shrugged. "They'll be all right," he grinned. "I might even give them my personal attention."

Gialnis almost screamed. Zircuth took her by the arm and led her out of the hall, followed by the older priest and the official from Thoronis. Garthanas stood there alone with Thamas I and the six naked virgins, who now glared at him in hatred and disillusionment.

"I have a greater test than virgins," said Thamas I. "What are you going to do about Hamardeen? Since the medallion has changed hands, the Golden Ship may not carry out my last command. It may have stopped, or turned around to come back to Thronas."

"I think that if it comes back—it should pick up every Hamarian we can find — perhaps even the half-breeds and sympathizers, even including Gialnis, Zircuth, and Adamas and Yevea. As long as all our 'enemies' are being concentrated on Hamardeen for the final blow, we might as well make a thorough job of it."

Thamas I considered this in some wonderment. "You do not include Merlanthis," he said.

Garthanas produced the same unfathomable smile again. "My sister — my bride," he said, laconically.

Thamas I responded with a faint smile. "I don't blame you. She is a terrific woman for you. But—should we not spare Gialnis?"

Garthanas shrugged. "If you wish. But recall your guests and courtiers. Let the celebrations continue in honor of Muthark's might!"

WITHIN two days, the Golden Ship returned to Thronas, and Hamardeen still shone in the evening sky. All captured Hamarians were herded on board. For two days they had been coming in from the suburbs and outlying districts, as the Thronasian guards discovered them. The ship made trips to other cities and picked up more, until several hundred had been collected. And at last it visited Hedenas.

It was Zircuth who prevailed upon Adamas and Yevea and Gialnis to board the ship—though how he did it no one knew and only Garthanas could surmise. After that, the ship departed for Ha-

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mardeen.

On that same night, Merlanthis came to the Palace at Muthark. She was admitted at once and led to the throne-room. There she saw Garthanas, alone, seated on the Emperor's throne. Beside it, another throne had been erected. He wore on his chest the gleaming medallion that was the sacred key to the power of Muthark.

Only the muffled sounds of merriment going on in other parts of the Palace and in the sprawling city outside penetrated here. Though the great, domed chamber measured twenty *talii* in diameter, his voice carried to her easily.

"Come in, Carthis. This is where you belong."

He watched her as she walked slowly and hesitantly toward him. There was a grim smile about the corners of his mouth as he observed her carefully prepared coiffure, the jewels in her black hair, the artistic application of cosmetics on her perfect face, and the rich robes she was wearing. If she had not come prepared to accept, she would not have taken such pains with her appearance.

"It's like my father said," he told her, as she came to the bottom of the dais. "Now that we're on *this* side of the fence, it's different—isn't it, *Empress?*"

Her body was richly clothed, but to him her mind and soul were naked, and she knew it. She ran up the steps and fell at his feet, her glorious head in his lap.

"Oh my love!" she exclaimed. "May the gods forgive us!"

He stroked her hair. "What is this—conscience? Our power and glory lies above such things, Carthis. We are to be Emperor and Empress of all Thronas. Come—" He made her get up. "Take your throne and see how it feels."

She sat in it, looking at him. Her eyes began to gleam, and finally a full, triumphant smile came to her lips. She got up and threw herself into his arms, passionately. "Garthanas! We did it! It's true at last!"

When she kissed him, however, she tensed. She drew back to look him in the eye, wonderingly. "Your lips!" she exclaimed. "They—Garthanas! They're cold as stone! What is the matter with you?"

At that moment, Thamas I came running into the throne room, his eyes blazing with anger. Behind him came a number of guards and noblemen, all terrified.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Garthanas' father.

Carthis disengaged herself and promptly seated herself on the other throne. No one took time to bow.

"What do you mean?" queried Garthanas, calmly, while idly fingering his medallion.

"The Golden Ship! It has not gone to Hamardeen! It hovers above Muthark, neither making a move to land or depart!"

"That is right," said Garthanas.

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"It is as I planned it."

Carthis drew in her breath sharply and looked at him with widened eyes.

"Muthark should show its might," Garthanas continued, "by placing its mark on the face of the universe. But why Hamardeen? Why not the great planet of Thronas, itself?"

The guards and noblemen shouted, drawing their swords. Thamas I drew his and sprang up the steps of the dais, to be met instantly by Garthanas, who was laughing at him, his own sword in guard position.

"Hamardeen is grateful," he laughed. "You did well to provide for the safety and complete isolation of the Hamarians. Now Thronas—world of wealth and power—*die!*"

A great light flooded in the tall window niches of the room. Everyone ran through the arches that led to the balconies overlooking the city — except Garthanas, and Carthis.

"The ship!" they heard someone shout. "It glows! It is bathed in golden fire!"

"The power of the stars," said Garthanas.

Wordlessly, Carthis ran to him and tried to snatch the medallion away. In her eyes was a fire of rage bordering on insanity. He held her arm back.

"You idiot!" she screamed. "You madman! Stop the ship!"

Thamas I raced into the room, his sword still drawn, followed by frantic guards and noblemen. "Seize him!" he shouted. "Some of you may die—but kill him—take the medallion! He is mad!"

"Madness?" queried Garthanas. "Then was it such cool sanity that made you send the ship against Hamardeen?" He laughed. "It's different, isn't it, when you're on *this* side of the fence?"

The face of Thamas I appeared to turn to chalk, the flame of power smothered out in his eyes. He was now a trembling old man whose reason crumbled with the world he had ruled.

"But—" His white lips quivered. "Do you expect—the ship—to destroy you?—with that medallion in your hand?"

Garthanas appeared to gain in inner strength and perception. He was calm now in a way that was terrifying because it was unfathomable. "The ship," he answered, "is not a god, any more than Shivathis is a goddess. It is a blind machine, fashioned by Man to obey his will. If I so order it—as I have done—it will destroy the holder of this key to power." He held up the medallion. "In twice ten thousand years, perhaps, men will be wise enough to use such power well. But we are not ready. On this world, Man has already destroyed himself. This is but the funeral pyre." Yellow flame seared the sky outside as mountain chains burst into volcanic disruption. "This is the cleansing fire."

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An earthquake smote the palace, and many lost their balance, falling to the floor. Carthis screamed.

"Empress!" exclaimed Garthanas. "You have forgotten your dignity and your position of wealth and power. Take the Throne!" He came to her and shoved her down into the seat. Then he took his own, while the ground shook—and rolled—and the walls of the throne-room cracked—and a roar of alarm arose from the great city that had been interrupted in its celebrations.

Thamas I and others behind him went berserk with terror. Just as they began to charge Garthanas, a segment of the great dome fell in and crushed them in the center of the floor.

Garthanas sat there and saluted the Golden Ship and its occupants. Through the gap in the dome he could see the terrible vessel, engulfed in a concentration of energies pouring into it and out of it, from the stars. He grinned, slightly, realizing that Zircuth had figured him out. That was why the old priest had been able to get Gialnis, Adamas and Yevea on board. Zircuth alone had foreseen what he was really going to do.

"Long live Hamar," he said.

Carthis, who had reached the coveted Throne of Muthark at last, stared at the tumbling world in unbelieving horror, the color and beauty of her turned from flesh to clay.

THE last command which Garthanas gave the Golden Ship was obeyed. It transported its passengers to Hamardeen. But the destruction of Thronas was felt even there. For years that flaming wreckage of a once mighty world continued to flash through the heavens, much of it falling upon Hamardeen and filling its atmosphere with radioactivity. The Golden Ship waited patiently until the survivors realized it intended to transport them to another world where they could be safe.

On the third world from the sun, known to them as Dlahtasdeen, the survivors found uncertain haven. Storms, ferocious animals and heat drove them to higher lands, separating them until only small groups of survivors were left, far up in the mountains, where the heat was less intense.

Adamas and Yevea discovered a tropical haven at the top of a great mountain. They lived there together in that vast, natural garden, which they named Hedenas. And the surrounding country they called Aralanthas — names from another world, which their children and the children of the Hamarian survivors preserved, in one form or another, throughout the ensuing ages.

Now the work of the Golden Ship was done. It moved off into the star-sea, no man knew where, to meditate perhaps forever on the mysteries of man and god—which were incomprehensible to its me-

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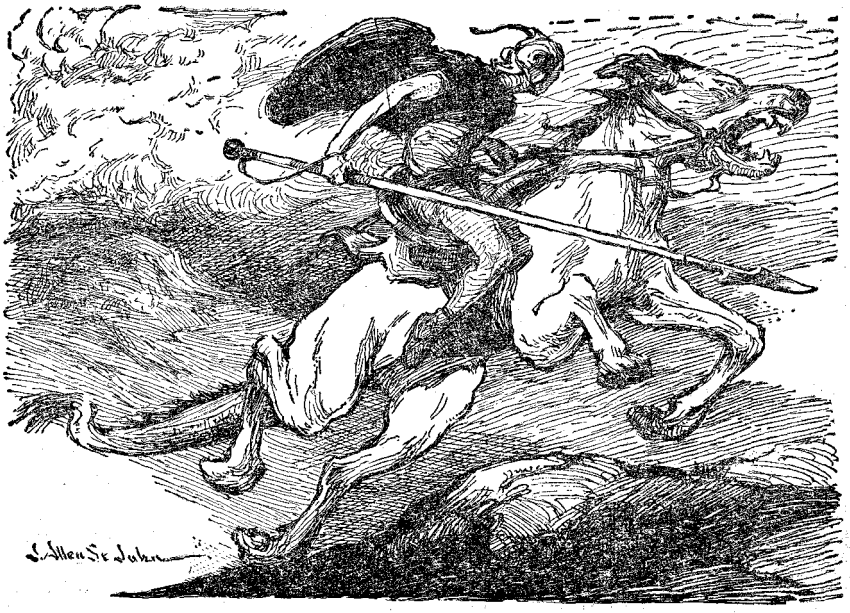
chanical mind.

On lonely little Hamardeen, where the untended canals grew thick with a sickly vegetation and radioactive sands from the deserts crept upward into the once green hills of Tharlanthis and swirled through the empty halls of an abandoned villa, the heroic statue of a warrior appeared to look beyond the marble walls at the dead fragments of a world swirling endlessly through the dark of the star-sea beyond Hamardeen — as though it were aware of tremendous vistas of a glorious and inglorious past.

Someone had inscribed the words of an epic lament in its base, which ended:

Their dreams of old we, too, have known,
But we are flesh and they are stone,
And Yesterday is dust . . .

THE END



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Johnny had to choose between his book on *The Ballistical Method of the Calculation of Rocket Ascents* and the beautiful brunette passenger. Unfortunately, his experience with beautiful brunettes was limited.

By Walt Sheldon

THE TECHNICAL SWAIN

IT was eighteen hundreds hours — precisely eighteen hundred hours —Earth time, and so Johnny Ryan, First Pilot of the passenger rocket *Selena* went into the lounge for his evening book and beer. He pulled himself toward a chair by means of the nylon loops all over the ceiling and walls. He floated dreamily, like a man under water, since gravity was negligible now that they were twenty-four hours and sixty-thousand miles from earth.

Rossokovsky, the steward, brought his beer in the space-drinker, an enclosed vessel with a spout for sipping. "Thanks Rossy," Johnny said. He hooked the beer to a retainer cord, strapped himself in the chair, and then picked up a weightless book that was also attached to a cord. The pages fluttered in slow motion. The title of the book was *The Ballistical Method of the Calculation of Rocket Ascents*. It was full of charts and tables. It was—Johnny Ryan would have told you—infinitely fascinating.

It must have been. A few minutes later Johnny and his scowl and the book were one, and he didn't even notice the female passenger who pulled herself gracefully into the lounge. This was especially odd because the female passenger was, to say the least, noticeable. She was young, she had golden-red hair, and she was built. But stacked. She wore a taupe slack suit and the usual corsage the company passed out to female passengers at the middle of each twenty-four hour period.

She glanced at Johnny, looked pleasurably startled for a moment, and then seemed to catch herself at it. She immediately made her herself to another chair, across the aisle from Johnny. The steward floated toward her.

"Coffee?"

"Yes, Miss Watson."

Johnny, hearing the voices vaguely, looked up in a perfunctory way. His mind was still rolling along with his reading matter, going at the steady pace to which he had trained himself. Each period, from eighteen to

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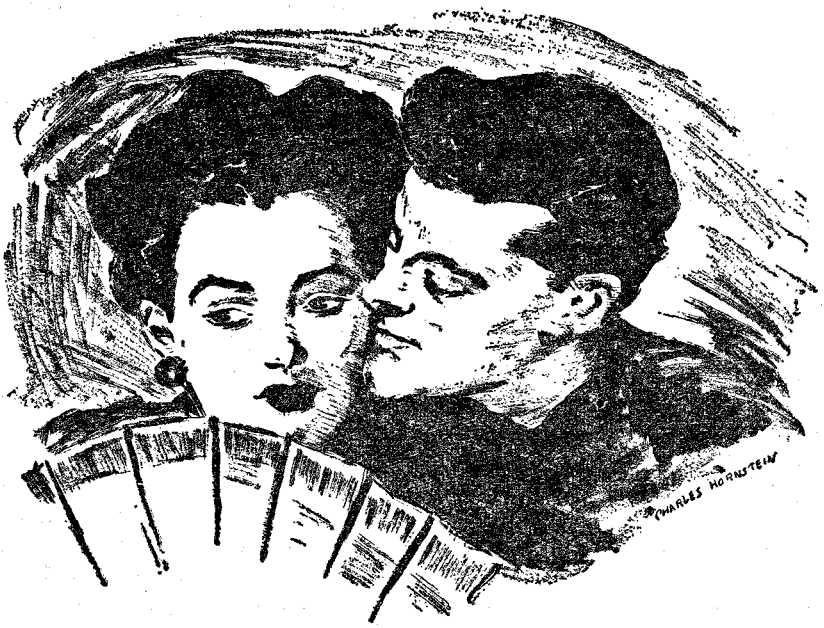

nineteen hundred hours, he could absorb about twelve thousand words; he could do this four times each trip, or eight times each round trip, and multiplied by eleven trips per year that made—

Johnny Ryan was jolted from his blithe concentration. His eyebrows rose. One of the passengers, of course, and he hadn't seen her before because he'd been busy charting his synergic departure curve when the passengers had boarded at the New Albuquerque spaceport.

The girl was also reading: her book, clipped to a retaining cord, floated weightlessly and unheld before her, and Johnny could see that it was the Interlingual Phrase Book usually issued to newcomers to the moon. Undoubtedly she was going to work for the International Commission in the vast underground city just on the edge of the Mare Imbrium.

She looked up suddenly—probably feeling Johnny's stare upon her.

Johnny tried to drop his eyes, but didn't make it quickly enough.

"Hi," she said.

"Uh—hello," said Johnny.

He was suddenly tongue-tied. He was always this way with girls, and whenever they told him that his short-cropped black hair and strong, round chin was attractive, as they often did, that only made it worse. The trouble was that Space School didn't offer a course in Getting to First Base with Young Ladies. There were so blasted many other things to learn in the long

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ten year training period that a fellow just had to skip essentials until he got out. Of course, not all of them ended up with Johnny's sorry plight. Ralph Kingston, his co-pilot, for instance, had an admirable technique with women. But then Ralph didn't spend the time Johnny did with things like The Ballistical Method of the Calculation of Rocket Ascents. But then Ralph was still a co-pilot—

"You're Captain Ryan, the pilot, aren't you?" the breathlessly stacked dream was saying, smiling at him. "I'm Margot Watson."

Johnny managed to make a sound. It came out, "Oh."

"I suppose you must always get the same questions from passengers every trip, so I won't bother to ask the ones I can think of. Only I—well, I have to admit I'm excited by the whole thing."

"Your first trip?" It was a major effort for Johnny to think of that. As he heard himself say it, it seemed the sort of thing he ought to say. For him it was a kind of triumph.

Margot Watson nodded. She had a fresh, cool face, he thought; capable and untroubled, and he'd noticed before that International Commission girls usually had this air. With her it seemed even more natural and less studied. "I'm to be a secretary with I.C. But I supposed you must have guessed that."

"Uh—yes," said Johnny.

Rossokovsky floated back in with her coffee then, she clipped the space-drinker to a cord, and took a cigarette case from her pocket. She held a cigarette, looked up at Johnny and said, *"Usted have feuer?"*

"What?" said Johnny.

"I'm just practicing my Interlingual," she said, laughing. "I think that's the right way to ask for a match."

"Oh. Sure," said Johnny, and found his lighter. He gave it a little push and it floated in mid-air across the aisle to her. He had never bothered to study Interlingual, which was a combination of six languages used as official jargon on the moon. He knew that it had been developed by a World Assembly committee after about a year of haggling, with each nation trying to get a majority of its own vocabulary and syntax accepted.

Now she was looking thoughtful. "I said I wasn't going to ask questions, but there's one I can't resist. Hope you don't mind. This one's been bothering me. If there's no air in space, how on earth do you use the rudders to steer the rocket?"

It was as if a control lock had been removed. Now Johnny could function. Now he was in his element and he could talk. He brightened. "Well, as a matter of fact they aren't rudders, they're fins, and they aren't used to steer the rocket, merely to support it, end up, on the ground, and stabilize it slightly during the first few seconds of ascent in atmosphere. Change of direction utilizes the third law of motion, which is the basis of rocket science. In effect we spin large wheels, mounted on three planes, transversely, longitudinally and horizontally, and the ship then turns in the opposite

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direction to the spin. However, it continues upon its original course until we give a blast from the rockets, that forces it into a new path."

"Oh," said Margot, looking bewildered herself now.

Johnny was hot. He leaned forward and kept talking. He discussed exhaust velocity and mass ratio and Keplerian orbits. He rattled off the long formula for calculating velocity through diminishing air resistance and discussed the relationship of current mass ratio to braking under conditions of reduced gravity.

"Oh," Margot kept saying. "Oh."

Johnny was happy.

And then abruptly his happiness was shattered as Co-pilot Ralph Kingston pulled himself into the compartment. Kingston was a big, friendly looking man with ginger-colored hair, fine teeth and a perpetual grin. For all his bulk he moved loosely, like a boxer. The moment he saw Margot his grin widened, and he gave himself an extra hard pull so that he sailed like a paper dart to the chair beside her. He stopped himself neatly on the nylon loop there. "Howdy, miss!" he said. "Getting the low down from Johnny here? He's the boy can give it to you. My name's Kingston. Call me Ralph. You must be Margot Watson. Saw your name on the passenger list. Whatcha drinkin'? Coffee, eh? How about a Martini. Rossokovsky makes the best Martinis in space."

"Well——all right, thanks," said Margot, still trying to adjust herself to this sudden change of pace.

Johnny frowned at Kingston. "Did you get that fix on Regulus and the ecliptic already?"

"Sure," said Ralph. "We're on orbit. Stop worrying." He turned toward the galley, bawled Rossokovsky's name, then turned to Margot again. "Going to work for I.C, I'll bet, huh? Look, we're laying over ninety-six hours on the moon and you're going to need a good guide to the underground city. How about it?"

"You mean—you?"

"Mrs. Kingston's little boy Ralph," said Ralph, and Johnny winced.

Margot laughed and said, "I'd love to. I've heard so much about the underground city."

"Nothing like it," Ralph said.

And he started to tell her all about it. He worked in a good deal of information about Ralph Kingston, too, and Johnny had to admit to himself that the boy was good. His voice was pleasant, his timing was just right, and he had a way of holding interest. Margot was turned toward him, laughing, hanging on his words.

Johnny sighed. He unbuckled himself then, floated to the middle of the aisle, grabbed a loop and said, "Guess I'll go forward and check the course again."

"Sure, Johnny, do that,"said Ralph happy and unoffended. "You can't be too careful about these things."

In the control cabin Johnny strapped himself in again and stared at the big screen that showed the moon just off the port bow and the black infinity of space beyond it. The stars didn't twinkle out here, beyond the atmosphere. They glared

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at him. He glared back at them. He felt suddenly unreal and lonely; he felt as though he, at this moment, was the only living being in all of space. But he also felt disturbed and excited and his wrists tingled. It took him quite a while to figure out just what had happened to him. When he finally did he tried her name a couple of times, saying, "Margot . . . Margot," savoring it —and then he looked at the moon and stars and sighed again.

Johnny took his sleep period as soon as Kingston relieved him and he tossed on the bunk for a long time without sleeping.

He made a couple of brave tries the next day. He found, at least four times, excuses to go back into the passenger compartment. The first time Margot was busy studying her Interlingual Phrase Book again, and she didn't see him, and he couldn't quite find the nerve to interrupt her. The second time she was staring at the space screen and she did notice him from the corner of her eye as he entered. She turned her head and smiled at him. She smiled wonderfully.

"Uh—good morning," Johnny said.

"Good morning."

"Everything okay?"

"Just fine."

"Well—uh—I just wanted to make sure everything was okay," said Johnny. He went back to the control cabin.

The third time he slipped into the empty seat beside her. He managed to steel himself enough to do that. "Doesn't get too boring just sitting here, does it?" he asked.

"It hasn't yet." She nodded at the screen. "The stars fascinate me. And the edge of the moon there, getting bigger all the time."

"Yes," said Johnny. "The reason that you see the edge, and not a full view, is that we're actually on a curve which is a segment of an ellipse, with one of its focal points in the center of the earth."

And he was off again. He gave her a full course in ballistics. He couldn't help himself. It was the only way he could make himself talk.

The fourth time he came into the passenger compartment Ralph Kingston was there ahead of him. They were talking and laughing and Ralph had his arm lightly over the back of Margot's chair.

He went back to the control cabin and looked at space again. Glared at it. The age of specialization, he thought. Anything a man did these days was so difficult to do it didn't leave him time to learn anything else —unless maybe he just wanted to coast along the way Ralph Kingston did. He pictured Ralph. He went over his measurements mentally. Big lad, Ralph—he wondered if he could take him if he got in a fast poke right away and achieved the psychological advantage of surprise. Only what good would that do? No, the only thing that would help would be for him to get to Margot and start talking like a human being instead of a textbook on space. Only how could you make yourself into something you weren't?

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He wished he was a robot. He wished he had a switch on him that said in one place SPACE PILOT and in another place JUST ORDINARY GUY and he wished he could click it back and forth to the convenient setting. . .

Kingston came in after a while. He floated forward, pulled himself into his co-pilot's seat and rubbed his hands. "Lovely dish, lovely dish," he said.

Johnny kept his eyes on Ursa Major, mentally calculating the declination, right ascension and parallax in seconds of arc.

"The layover's gonna be a pleasure this time," said Kingston. "Too bad we have to go back to earth so soon. Oh, well, there's plenty of asteroids in space, as the saying goes."

Johnny growled, "Take over," and left the control cabin.

At eighteen hundred hours that evening he almost forgot to go into the lounge for his usual book and beer. He was, in fact, six minutes late and Rossokovsky looked at his watch, then looked at Johnny curiously as he brought his beer. Johnny was through with *The Ballistic Method of the Calculation of Rocket Ascents* and now had with him *The Linear and Polar Coordinates of Space Curvature*. He opened it to the first of the tables. Ordinarily the figures, the progression and logic of everything would have given him a great deal of esthetic pleasure, in the way that a fine musician can enjoy reading a symphonic score. But right now he couldn't concentrate. He kept glancing aft, wondering when and if Margot Watson would appear.

She came finally, a floating vision, a thing of infinite grace sailing through the air in the lounge. She smiled and said hello, but there was a certain brightness lacking. She held her Interlingual Phrase Book with a kind of determination—as if to show Johnny that she meant to read, not talk.

He made a desperate try.

"Uh—of course it's none of my business," he began.

She looked up and said, "What?"

"Well, I was just wondering how you happened to get hooked up with I.C. Hope I'm not being nosy."

Some of the brightness returned. "Not at all." Then she started to talk about herself, and she told Johnny how she'd been bored in an insurance office in San Francisco, and how she'd lived in a girl-bachelor apartment there, and how she originally came from Minnesota where the folks had a farm, but didn't want to go back to the farm, and how she suspected at times that being a career girl wasn't what it was cracked up to be.

"Well, gosh, I should think lots of guys—I mean, I shouldn't think you'd be alone very much—what I mean to say is, somebody like you—" It had sounded right in his head when he started to say it, but for some reason it came out clumsily. He hated himself. He hated space, and rocket theory, and Ursa Major and the moon.

Margot laughed and said, "Haven't you seen the latest statistics? The male population has declined so much

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in the last century that a gal hardly has a chance any more."

"Statistics are a remarkable thing," he said, groping for high ground. "Take the average speed of gaseous molecules." He started to tell her about the average speed of gaseous molecules. He saw the brightness fade again. He knew it was wrong even as he did it—he was completely unable to help himself.

She interrupted him suddenly in the middle of an equation. "Johnny

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry, Johnny—I just don't understand half these things you talk about. I—" she was looking at him closely and queerly and Johnny could almost hear her mind say it was too bad it had to be this way—"I think I'll go back to the passenger compartment to study."

She moved off with her usual outward confidence and poise, but there was a sense of haste this time.

The minute she left the lounge Johnny took *The Linear and Polar Coordinates of Space Curvature* and hurled it to the floor. It bounced at almost the same rate of speed, struck the ceiling, slammed off in another direction, and kept whisking back and forth for another minute before it finally got caught behind a chair and came to rest.

Then Johnny saw that Margot's Interlingual Phrase Book was still hooked to the retaining cord. He reached for it, and scowled at the pages. She'd miss it in a moment of course and be back for it. Well, it would be better if he wasn't around. He'd only start telling her about the relationship of mass and nozzle diameter to exhaust velocity again. He read the headings idly as he flipped the pages of the book. All of the phrases were in neat little departments: Correspondence, International Money, The Market, The Home, The Kitchen, Man's Dress, Woman's Dress, Terms of Love and Endearment—

Ralph Kingston floated in from the forward hatch. "Hey! Where's the blonde? Where's the luscious dish?

Johnny turned and glared at him.

"Think I'll go cheer her up," said Ralph. "She's looking for a husband, but Mrs. Kingston's little boy Ralph will do till one comes along!" He laughed, pleased with himself.

"Lay off," said Johnny.

Ralph said, "What?"

Johnny said, "You stay here. *I'm* going back there. *I'm* going to keep her company."

"You?" Ralph pointed; he looked astonished for a moment and then he started laughing.

"You heard me," said Johnny.

Ralph said, "Make way for an operator. Make way for a real technician."

"No. You stay here."

"Oh, pulling your rank, huh?"

"That's not an order. I'm just telling you."

"Well, if it's not an order, move aside, chum. That little old gal needs me. She needs Dr. Kingston's little old treatment for lonely blondes—"

Johnny couldn't help himself. He

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swung, and it wasn't quite voluntary. He caught Ralph on the jaw, rather neatly, he couldn't help but notice, and Ralph, with no gravity to hold him to the floor started bouncing back and forth. Johnny left while he was still bouncing.

In the passenger cabin Margot was looking at the screen again, staring into space. Johnny sat down beside her. She turned and stared at him in surprise. He held the Interlingual Phrase Book and it was opened to the section on Love and Endearment.

"I lieber usted," said Johnny.

She said, *"What?"*

He said, "Don't talk English. Talk Interlingual. That's the only way I'll get to say anything. I don't know how to talk about rockets in Interlingual. I lieber usted."

"That means 'I Love you.' "

"Yes. I mean—*da.*"

She stared for just another moment and then she said, "Johnny. . . darling. . ."

He tossed the book into gravityless space and it went bouncing gaily around the cabin. Ralph pulled himself into the cabin just then. He entered just in time to see them come together. He frowned, rubbed his jaw, thought for a moment, then shrugged and went forward again.

Margot took a deep breath between Kiss Two and Kiss Three. "Darling," she breathed, "it's wonderful—you don't have to talk—you don't have to say anything—you don't have to tell me about parabolic curves or anything."

"Ellipses, actually, not parabolae," said Johnny. "The difference is in the placement of the focal points. Ballisticians thought for years that the path of a projectile was a parabola when, as a matter of fact—"

She grabbed him and put a quick stop to it.

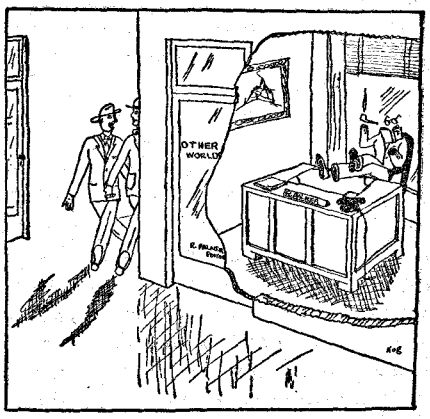
The other passengers stared.

The *Selena* coasted blithely through space on its Keplerian orbit to the moon.

First Pilot Johnny Ryan making up for lost time.

Fella could easily devote a lifetime to the study of something like this, he was thinking. . . .

THE END



"You'll like Palmer—he's real gone, and so's his magazine."

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A STITCH IN TIME

By

Howth Castle and J. P. Caravan

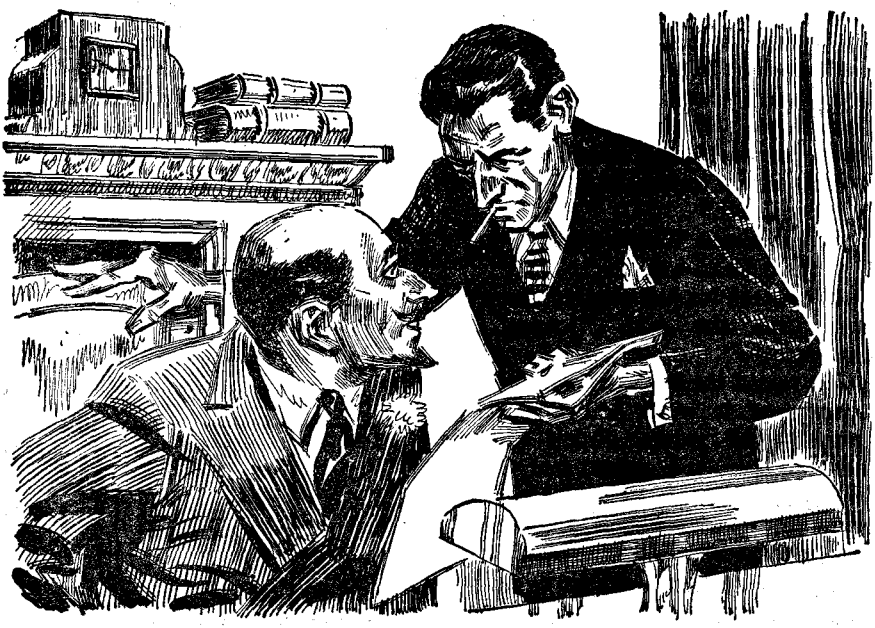

Illustration by Michael Becker

When you start trying to figure out a way to go back in time and clean up on the horse races, it's time to see a psychiatrist. Bosley did, and the psychiatrist solved his problem.

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IT was a pleasant morning, a very pleasant morning, the rich kind of morning that promises a gold and silver day. Doctor Nicholls squeaked his hands together in delight and rubbed them fondly over his bald head. He whirled happily in his swivel chair and hummed what may have been a tune. The expensive desk glittered in the gay sunshine; the expensive clock struck ten.

"Time is money," cried Doctor Nicholls to himself. "To work, to work." He pushed a button.

The expensive receptionist came into the office. "There is one patient, doctor. A new one."

The doctor's heart jumped with delight, like a trout leaping high after a golden bug. "Fine," he said. "Does my goatee need combing?"

"It's perfect, doctor."

"Good. Let's have the nut in, then."

"Doctor. . ." She stood in the doorway, hesitating.

"Well?"

"This one doesn't look rich."

"Not rich?"

"This one looks crazy."

The gold went out of the sunshine: it wasn't a pleasant morning any more. The doctor's regular patients were all plump and wealthy and sometimes a bit neurotic. Whenever someone who was less than wealthy and more than neurotic came to the doctor for help, he would have the patient committed at once. Sometimes Doctor Nicholls lost a whole afternoon in the process.

He sighed. "All right, Martha. Send him in. You might call the State Hospital and have them reserve a bed."

"What ward, doctor?"

"How should I know what ward before I've seen the patient? The violent ward, tell them the violent ward—they're usually violent when I have them committed." When he laughed you could see the gold glitter in his teeth. "Especially the sane ones. Show him in, Martha, show him in."

In good humor again, he waited for his patient.

"Hello, Uncle Milton."

Doctor Nicholls leaped to his feet. "Bosley," he said angrily. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm crazy, Uncle Milton."

"Get out of here."

Bosley ran a hand through his dust-colored hair. "You better cure me," he said. "Suppose I went and told some of your patients what the Latin on that diploma of yours really means."

The doctor slumped back in his chair. It squeaked mournfully beneath him. "You wouldn't," he said.

"Know all men by these here presents that Milton Nicholls has fulfilled and accomplished the requirements of our faculty and has proven himself fully worthy of the honors and trusts and rights and benefits of a graduate of this school and is hereby awarded the certifi-

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cate of Television Service Man, second class."

"All right," said the doctor. "All right."

"Why second class, Uncle Milton?"

"I flunked."

"Oh."

"What is it you want, Bosley?"

"I told you, Uncle Milton. I want you to cure me."

"Cure you of what?"

"I got a feeling . . ."

"Come to the point, Bosley. Don't waste my time. Time is money."

"Yeah." Bosley waved a racing form at his uncle. "That's just my problem: time and money. I got this idea a couple of years ago and now it's driven me batty."

The doctor waved glumly at the couch. "Lie down and tell me about it."

"I better stay standing up. I fall asleep if I lie down."

"Get plenty of fresh air and vegetables. Take a long trip. Goodbye."

"I can't take a trip. I got no money."

"You have no money?"

"If you cure me I'll pay you a million dollars."

"Bosley, will you tell me what you're talking about?"

"Listen, Uncle Milton. It's like this. I figured if I knew how all the horse races came out for the last hundred years or so I could really clean up. Know what I mean?"

The doctor twisted his goatee. "No," he said.

"I figured I could win every time if I just learned the winner of each race and then went back and made a bet on it."

"Went back where, in heaven's name?"

"Went back in time, Uncle Milton. I figured this all out, understand? I figured it out and then I spent the next couple of years learning them."

"Learning what?"

"I told you. I learned the results of every race in the world for the last hundred years."

The doctor looked at his nephew. "My advice to you, Bosley, is to go back in time and make your bets. Goodbye." He reached out to shake hands.

"I can't."

"You can't? You can't do a simple thing like that? Shame, Bosley. Why don't you go away somewhere and try some more?"

"That's what's driving me crazy, Uncle Milton. You got to fix me up so I can go back in time."

So for six months Doctor Nicholls wasted his golden afternoons trying to cure his nephew.

"Bosley," he said after the end of the sixth month. "Are you sure you know the results of every race for the last hundred years?"

"Sure."

The doctor took down a book. "Tell me who won the stakes at Dublin on June 16th of 1904."

"Throwaway." Bosley smiled

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proudly. "Do you want the time?"

"Never mind. I had hoped you might be forgetting this absurd information."

"It's not absurd, Uncle Milton. Soon as I go back I can clean up."

"Listen, Bosley." The doctor placed his hands together and leaned over his desk. He had worked hard to reach this minute. It was his last plan. "Listen. If you really went back to 1904, would you remember the future?"

"Don't be silly, doc. How can you remember what hasn't happened yet?"

"Then how would you remember the winner?"

"I don't know, Uncle Milton. I just would. I'd just walk up to the bookie and the name of the horse would come to me."

Doctor Nicholls' eyes glittered. He leaned further over the desk. "Then how do you know you haven't?"

"Haven't what?"

"How do you know you haven't come back to *this* point in time from fifty years in the future? Look at it that way, Bosley, and this absurd compulsion or whatever it is will vanish away. You won't want to go back to the past if you think of *this* as the past. Mental hygiene! Say these words to yourself each morning when you get up: every day in every way I'm getting further and further back. See? You said yourself that you wouldn't remember the future, didn't you?"

"Sure."

"And you can't remember the future, can you?"

"No."

"What more proof do you want?"

Bosley looked confused.

"And now goodbye, my boy. The rest is up to you. Pretend you've succeeded in your quest for the past and you'll be cured. Goodbye, Bosley, goodbye. Don't bother to come back."

Bosley went, but he came back.

He came back the next day with a satchel full of money, and he took out a million dollars and placed it on his uncle's desk.

"Thanks, Uncle Milton," he said. "You cured me. I remembered eight winners yesterday."

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THE TREASON OF JOE GATES

By Ralph Sloan

YEAH, I'm the guy, I guess. Yesterday I was a White House custodian, just a happy broom and mop jockey with a Security scrubbed history and a clean conscience. Today I don't know. People I never heard of call me a traitor. The F. B. I. even asked my little girl "does daddy talk about Marx and Lenin around the house?"

And I can't figure it out. Since you're reporters I'll tell it once more, then, honest, I've gotta sleep.

I been workin' at the White House about a year now. Cleanin' the President's office and anti-room is part of my job. I think that's why I stayed on. Goin' in there and switchin' on the lights did somethin' to me. I'd look

Illustrated by Joseph Eberle

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around and think, "History was made here. Right here. Today!" I'd get a patriotic lump in my throat. And sometimes I'd sit a minute in the President's chair and make like I was offerin' the Ambassador of Parkistan a cigar.

Well, last night didn't start no different. I dusted and swept around. I waxed the kitchen and finished the halls and cuspidors and was carryin' the vacuum into the antiroom when the President himself brushes past me and hurries straight on into his office. And he ain't alone neither. There's a flyin' wedge of Secret Service and secretaries right behind him. They all rush past me and for a minute it's like watchin' telephone poles from a fast freight.

No sir, I've never been a hobo. That's just an expression.

Well, I was stymied until the offices emptied. You see I always do the President's office last. He works late pretty often an' I figger it ain't good protocol to plug in the vacuum while he's squeezin' the budget. It was late and I'd already eaten lunch, so I just sat down in the hall and waited. Pretty soon I could see somethin' big was comin' off. Congressmen started runnin' in and you could tell they'd been pulled from bed and other places. And then. . .

No sir, I don't say 'other places' to slur congress. There was a Senator carryin' some cards. He threw 'em into the wastebasket, peevish like, before going into the President. Yes sir, I did later. Full house; sixes over queens. Yes sir, canasta I guess.

Anyway, about an hour had gone when the Army huddle arrived. There were generals and colonels walking as though they had only one pair of pants; tight against this guy in the middle like a miser holdin' a dime. And he. . .

No sir, that ain't an innuendo an' I don't think the government's tight. The government's fine; its a great country. I really like my job, honest to God. Please let me finish. I need to sleep.

Now, this guy in the center was clumpin' along in what looked like a diving suit with the headpiece off. He looked tired and had a stubby beard like he hadn't shaved for a couple of days and he was carrying a small package.

Yes sir, you're darned right I took a lot of notice. How many people do ya think visit the President in the middle of the night wearin' a diving suit? No, I'm not gettin' sarcastic. I'm just tired and my name ain't Buster. It's Joe Gates. No, I wasn't named after Stalin.

Well, after the Army went in, the Secret Service buttoned the offices up tight. Nothing I could do. I just waited. After awhile they sent out for food and. . .

No sir, I don't have no confederate tappin' wires. I figgered they'd sent for food when I saw the cook bring in sandwiches. And another thing. Anybody who says I tried

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bribin' the cook to smuggle a camera into the conference is a liar. All I did was ask him for a sandwich. I think he'd of given me one too if some Secret Service guy hadn't hustled him right on in.

Two hours went by and the meeting got noisy. I was tired and hungry and I could imagine the mess they'd leave for me.

No sir, I don't mean political. I'm talking about the floor.

Anyhow, they were gettin' loud inside. I wasn't tryin' to listen, but I did hear "Rockets, phooey!" mentioned and "protective tariff". A minute later the senator from Wisconsin shouted "It'll ruin the country." He sounded real mad to me. Politicians call it "indignant," I guess.

Sir, I knew it was the senator from Wisconsin because he would say a couple of words, then stop and start over again twice as loud. Nothin' subversive about it. I remembered him from one of those radio roundtables.

Well, right after the Senator sounded off, things seemed to fly all to pieces and the conference broke up and congressmen came streamin' out and some of them were joking and lookin' happy and some of them weren't. The Army hustled off their divin' suit and I remember the Senator from Wisconsin and some congressmen from Washington and California and other states I don't remember marchin' like pallbearers. There was a fellow with them named George something-or-other who's a big wheel in the dairy lobby. They looked worried and I heard them talk about calling congress into special session and . . .

No sir, this George ain't a pal of mine. He brought over a couple of cases of cottage cheese cartons for the White House staff once. Creatin' good will, he said. Except one of the cases broke open and made a mess on the carpet. He was pretty embarrassed, but I'd just come on work and I got it cleaned up before anyone noticed. He took my name and a week later he sent us five gallons of frozen custard. No sir, just the custard. Yes sir, I'm sorry too. We'd like to have a freezer.

Well, the President was the last to come out and he looked. . . No, never mind. I'm too tired to explain that one.

I went in and started cleaning up the office. I hoped there'd be a sandwich left, but there wasn't. Just some cheese and stale crackers. I found a cup of coffee that was still warm, then started emptyin' ashtrays and gettin' ready to vacuum. It was already two hours after quittin' time.

Now here's the part that all seems to run together. I still don't understand it myself. I've told it to the F.B.I. and the Secret Service and Special Security and the C.I.B. They even phoned the President at some dinner in New York and I told him.

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Yes sir, I'll tell it, but this is the last time even if they hang me. No sir, I don't think they will. Right now the Armed Services have first call and they want me shot.

Well, I'd just plugged in the vacuum and begun suckin' the crumbs and cigar ashes off the carpet when two Secret Service men came into the President's office. They didn't say anything and I was still sore about not gettin' a sandwich out in the hall there, so I just kept vacuumin'. Pretty soon I noticed them lookin' around wild like. They started moving things about, furniture and things, and rumaging in the wastebasket. When they took to pullin' drawers outta the President's desk and emptyin' 'em on the rug, I got real sore. Here I was three hours overtime; tired and hungry and these guys were messin' things up faster'n I could clean. I turned off the vacuum and asked them what the heck do ya think you're doing. Then they told me.

That's it fellas. I haven't had any sleep yet and I haven't eaten anything either. But I want you to know I was in this by myself.

But look, how could I know the Army diver had come off a rocket trip to the Moon? And nobody told me that package was a chunk of moon real estate? How was I to figure somebody would forget and leave it lyin' around? And who'd ever believe a thing like that in the first place?

Yes sir, hangin's too good for me, but as I said, the Armed Forces are ahead. I don't much care. They got my cell ready now and I'm pretty tired. One more thing though. The dairy lobby gave out that it was smelly and flat. It wasn't. It was pleasantly sharp. Like Roquefort.

The End

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SURE THING

By Frank Patton

Joe and Twitchy needed a sure way to beat the numbers racket, and Joe found the answer in his science-fiction magazines. It was fool-proof, which is a good thing when you're trying to outsmart Big Ben (the Big Bloody) Bogart.

Illustration by H. W. McCauley

Couple more numbers like that, and we'll land in the Home for Bum-guessing Gamblers," grumbled Twitchy McGoniff.

"Maybe you shoulda took a course in math at the Univoisity," suggested Joe (the Rat) Pefferkorn. There was no humor in his mournful expression, but as Twitchy glared at him, with rising ire, he added hastily, "No kiddin, the numbers is going against us sumpin awful lately."

"The way we figured it, it shoulda been a sure thing," said Twitchy. His right cheek twitched up and down several times until its motion threatened to assume a perpetuity, then he slapped at his face and the twitching stopped.

"Quit knockin' yourself out," said Joe. "It *is* a sure thing, only the bank don't seem to cooperate none. The clearings always come out with the wrong numbers."

"It ain't the numbers, it's the way we play 'em," said Twitchy. "If we only knew in advance what the numbers would be. . ."

"You mean like in science fiction, where we step into a time machine and go into the future, then come back and lay out the setup so it avoids all the big winning combos?"

Twitchy laughed sarcastically. "Look, Joe, if you're going to bring up that cockeyed contraption of yours again, I'll crown you with a complete file of *Galaxy*. If you'd quit readin' that *stuff*, as you call it, and do a little figuring on paper, maybe we'd do better in the numbers."

"It ain't *stuff*," said Joe petulantly, "it's *stf.....stef.....*s-t-f."

"I kin spell!" said Twitchy belligerantly. "It's the numbers that don't come out right . . ."

"Kin you spell entropy?"

"Entropy? What the hell for?"

"Well, that's the stuff that makes time travel work. And it's the stuff I'm using in my machine. I got it out of *Astounding Science*

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Fiction, and Campbell bases all his fiction on absolute fact . . . you heard what he said at the Convention."

"Yeah, I *heard* it. And I also heard what he said about that other rag you keep moaning about . . . that *Universe!*"

"Well," defended Joe, "it ain't as bad as *Imagination* . . ."

"You *said* it," said Twitchy. "And now, get the hell out of here, and start thinking about how come we are being beat on the numbers instead of *imagining* all that junk."

Mournfully Joe walked out of the door. In an equally mournful manner he opened the cellar door and went down into the basement. But as he reached the bottom, a strange elation spread over his face. Very unmournfully he made his way over to a rough workbench and stood looking at a maze of wires and gadgets that formed a large and awe-inspiring network of confusion surrounding an area of completely empty air. That is, empty except for a copy of *If*.

"Now, *if* I could only send that magazine into the future . . ."

Joe began to study the network of wires, and experimentatively disconnected and reconnected some of them. "Lessee—the entropy goes in here, and comes out . . ." A sharp flash of shorted electricity made him jump. "Doggone, thought I had the current off. Might have electrocuted. . ." He

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stopped speaking, stared at the network of wires, and at the vacant space they enclosed.

If was gone!

For an instant he stared, then he turned and raced up the stairs. He burst into the room where Twitchy sat filling page after page with numbers, shuffling numbers tickets, and slapping at his twitching cheek.

"*If* is gone!" he shouted. "*If* is gone!

Twitchy turned around in his chair. "What?" he asked, his face a complete expanse of annoyance. "What did you say?"

"*If* is gone!" repeated Joe.

"Now what in hell sense does *that* make?" asked Twitchy, twitching and slapping almost in one motion. "You mean it is gone, don't you?"

"Yeah!" babbled Joe. "That's what I mean. It—I mean *If*—is *gone!* My entropy machine woiks!"

"If?" said Twitchy unbelievingly.

"Yeah!"

Twitchy turned wearily back to his figures. "Okay. And do me a favor, will you?"

"What?"

"*If* it *should* happen to 'woik,' keep me posted, willya?"

"I sure will!" said Joe happily, racing back toward the basement. "If I can get *If* back, I'll go there myself! And then you'll see. . . ."

Once more in the basement work shop-reading room, Joe flicked a switch and *If* was back. He bellowed happily in a stentorian voice.

"*If* is back!" he screamed.

There were the sound of footsteps above, and then Twitchy's voice came down the stairwell. "You mean *it,* don't you?" he screamed back. The ire in his voice was punctuated by the violent slam of the cellar door, which crashed into the doorframe with such vigor that the whole house shook for several seconds. Then the footsteps receded again.

Joe picked up the magazine from its nesting place in the network of wires and looked at it puzzledly. "No," he said. "*If,* not *it.* Where does he get that *it* stuff. . .?"

Carefully spreading the wires apart on the tangled contraption he wormed his way inside. Then he carefully reached out with the copy of *If* and pushed the switch button. And disappeared with half of *If* disappearing with him. The other half, containing an article on the Shaver Mystery, fell to the floor in a cloud of fluttering pieces of paper.

* * *

Joe (the Rat) Pefferkorn sauntered nonchalantly into the room where Twitchy McGoniff was still shuffling numbers tickets. "Well," he announced. "I done it."

Twitchy barely gave him heed. "You admit I was right, then," he said.

"Right about what?"

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"It was *it*, wasn't it?"

"*It* was *it* wasn't *it*," said Joe blankly. "Now who's talking silly? What's with all the *it* business?"

Twitchy twitched in annoyance. "What was all *your* business with the *it*?" he snarled.

"Oh that!" Joe assumed a lofty appearance. "Just what I was going to tell you. Me and *It* just went into the future—and back!"

Twitchy turned slowly and faced Joe. "What did you say?"

"I said my machine woiked. "I just came back from tomorrow."

Even more slowly Twitchy got to his feet. "Joe," he said carefully, "I told you if you didn't cut out fooling with that *stuff*. . ." he almost spat the word ". . .I was going to crown you with it. Well, that's exactly what I'm going to do. And when I've done it, I'm going to burn every copy of your collection, and if you ever bring another one into this joint, I'll..."

"How'd you like to read tomorrow's paper," said Joe calmly, fishing a folded newspaper from his pocket.

For a tense instant Twitchy stood rooted to the spot, then he began twitching uncontrollably. Joe leaped to his feet, slapped him in the face with the paper. The twitching stopped, and Twitchy said, "Thanks."

Then he took the paper from Joe's hand, opened it and read the date. "March 1, 1956. . ." His hand began to tremble. Joe, watching anxiously, doubled up his fist, but the expected wave of violent twitching failed to come. Instead Twitchy opened the paper carefully to the financial page and read the number in the small box in one corner. . . Then he uttered a yell, and leaped to the telephone on his desk. In a moment he was barking numbers into the transmitter. For a while Joe watched him, then shrugging his shoulders, he wandered back into the basement.

* * *

"Ruined!" moaned Twitchy, too weak to twitch. "Lost! Every cent. And in hock up to our necks. And in a few minutes Big Ben (the Big Bloody) Bogart will be up here to blast us with his boys. It's the end! We're finished, cooked, dead!"

Joe looked more mournful than he ever had at any time before. "But how could it be? You had tomorrow's paper! You couldn't possibly publish the wrong numbers. There wasn't a winning ticket out anywhere, the way you rigged it!"

"You louse," moaned Twitchy, trying to twitch, and failing. "You *louse*."

"Me?" How come I am a louse?" Joe looked hurt.

For an instant Twitchy rose to a towering height over Joe, then he slumped down again in complete despair. "Tomorrow's paper," he moaned. "You idiot. What gave you the idea that the newspaper was *tomorrow's* paper?"

"Easy," said Joe indignantly. "I

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send myself into the future, and come back with a paper. The paper is dated March 1. Since I make this trip on February 28, the last day of the month, March 1 is *tomorrow's* paper."

"For once you are right," said Twitchy. "March 1 *is* tomorrow's paper. And today, you jerk, is February 29. It's Leap Year! And in Leap Year, February has twenty-*nine* days!"

Joe looked stunned, then suddenly he leaped to his feet. "Say! We can pull the same stunt tomorrow, and . . .!"

"Sorry, boys," came a cold voice from the doorway. "Not on Big Ben you don't pull the same stunt tomorrow! How stupid do you think I am?" He stood aside and waved a hand. "Give it to 'em, boys," he said.

An instant later he surveyed the scene, then picked up a newspaper lying on the desk. "Imagine it," he said, glancing at the date. "They even faked tomorrow's paper. What a nerve! Big Ben don't get taken in the numbers more than once!"

He tossed the paper back on the desk, waved his boys out, and carefully closed the door behind him.

THE END

ALBERT A. NUETZELL *(Continued from page 2)*

of my career with architecture, cartooning and finer arts respectively. But finally, realizing where the real money was, settled down to commercial art.

At the present time I'm employed as one of the key artists, and idea men at the Pacific Title and Arts Studio, where 3 D and Wide Screen are *more* than just headaches! This is where almost all the major motion picture titles are made and filmed.

In my earlier career I taught at the California Institute of Art, in Los Angeles, and have had my work displayed in the "Legion of Honor" and the "Maxwell Galleries" of San Francisco.

At the present I live in Encino, California, in the famous San Fernando Valley, with my wife, son, and a dog named "Buttons." Between working on cover ideas and motion picture titles I design and produce silk-screen prints as a hobby. With some hundreds of these prints and just as many volumns of science-fantasy in my son's collection, we have been forced to contemplate on moving into the Hollywood Bowl.

As you might have guessed by now, I'm the guy who did the cover on this issue of Science Stories; which, by the way, I hope you have enjoyed as much as I did doing it!

THE END

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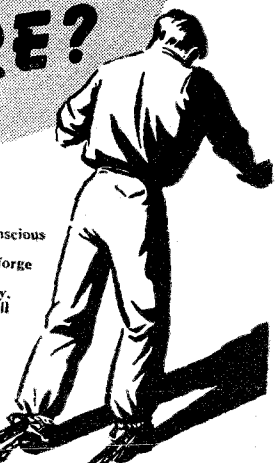

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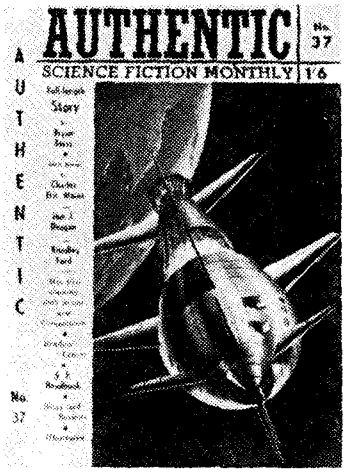

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